

DÜRR'S COLLECTION OF STANDARD
AMERICAN AND BRITISH
AUTHORS.

VOL. 74.

JOYCE DORMER'S STORY.

BY

JULIA GODDARD,

AUTHOR OF "ADRIANA", ETC.

VOL. II.



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THE HISTORY OF THE
AMERICAN AND BRITISH
ATTORNEYS

VOL. IV

JOYCE DORMER'S STORY

BY

ELLA GORDON

ATTORNEY AT LAW, ETC.

VOL. II

THE RIGHT OF TRANSLATION IS RESERVED.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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JOYCE DORRIS STORY

THE GODDARD

BY JOYCE DORRIS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

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JOYCE DORMER'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

AT REST.

AT length Mr. Lynn raised his head, and his eye fell upon the last paper.

He took it up mechanically and unfolded it. It was written at a much later period than the others, and in a trembling hand:—

I told you how that agony fell upon me, until distress of mind brought me to a bed of sickness, and then how weak but conquering I arose from it, and tried to go on with my everyday duties.

O John, it was harder to do that, than to lie in the angel's arms at rest. Then I was too weary to rebel; but when I had to bear the monotony of the long days, with each trifling event that made up the sum of them, it seemed as though the burden were too heavy for me.

Each morning I longed for the night, that I might lie still

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Each morning I longed for the night, that I might lie still

and passive, and sometimes in a transient dream forget the work-day world and all its troubles. And at night I longed for the morning, that I might be at work and in active labour wear the time away.

So nearly a year passed by, and then a wild desire came over me to see you once more. I thought if I could look upon your face again it would enable me to bear what I had determined to bear for your sake. I felt that I could die in peace if I could but see you in life once more. The longing came upon me like a power I could not resist. It seemed to influence me against my will. I must go; nothing could hinder me.

I strove to put away the wish as idle; but it gained upon me. I heard a voice for ever saying "Go." Day and night it never ceased.

Ah! it was but the utterance of my own heart, and yet it pleaded so mightily with sense and prudence that they gave way before it.

A hundred and fifty miles! It was a long journey, and I was very poor.

But no impediment daunted me. Had it been a thousand miles, and I had had every mile to journey on foot, I should have gone. A supernatural strength had come to me; all feeling of fatigue had vanished, and I made my preparations.

I left Doris in the care of a trusty though humble friend, a woman superior to her station.

I will not weary you with the details of my journey. I arrived on the evening of the second day at Craythorpe.

It was Saturday, for I had planned that I would see you in church on Sunday. I could watch you then, and you would be in ignorance of my presence.

At a cottage, tenanted by a poor widow, I obtained a lodging for the night. She saw how worn and tired I was, and had compassion upon me, and then, too, from my mourning weeds she believed me to be like herself, a widow.

Alas! I was more than a widow.

She had lived all her life at Craythorpe, so as we came to talk she told me all I wanted to know, little imagining how I hung upon her words.

She told me how you had come to Lynncourt, and what a fine place it was.

It was worth a stranger's going to see, if I were not too tired after I had had a cup of tea.

Too tired! my strength had all returned. I was rested.

And so I went and saw the place wherein my husband dwelt. I trod the stately avenue that he daily trod. I touched the handle of the gate because I knew it had often yielded to his touch. I lingered beneath the trees as if I thought they had some message for me.

And then we turned and wandered through the churchyard, where she showed me a little grave with a stone cross at its head, whereon were graven the names of Ellen and

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Teresa, the beloved children of John and Teresa Gresford Lynn.

O John, you had not forgotten me; I knew it.

I could have fallen down beside that cross and poured out a flood of thanksgiving for that one word "Ellen."

It was as a draught of cold water to the thirsty traveller in the desert, it revived my fainting heart. I knew that in your happiness I had not been absent from your thoughts, in that you gave your lost wife's name in love and sorrow to the elder child.

Now, on my death-bed, I thank you for that kindly thought and may it comfort you to know the consolation that it was to me.

I dared not stay, lest I should betray how deep the interest that I felt, and so I begged the woman to return.

I passed the night beneath her roof, but not in sleep. Long, long, I communed with myself through the night hours, and prayed for strength to bear me through the day.

At length the morning dawned, the cold grey light stole into the room, and I was still awake. I closed my eyes, but there was no sleep for me, and so I watched and watched until the rosy light should chase the grey away.

At length it came, and looking to the east I saw the sun in all his splendour unclothe his eyes upon the world.

A glorious day!

O sun! thou shinest with equal light upon the joyous and the sorrowful, the good and evil, the just and the unjust, and yet each seeing thee with his own eyes, beholds a different image in the heavens.

For me it seemed too bright, the light but mocked the dark cloud hovering over me and did not dispel it. It made the shadow sharper and more palpable.

It is strange how accurately I remember the most trifling event of that day and every sensation that I experienced.

As the sun rose, the birds began to sing. A gentle song, and yet it gave me rather torture than pleasure, I wished for everything to be quite still, to be hushed as my heart was.

Then the church bells began to chime, sweetly, cheerily, waking up the sleepers and telling them it was God's day. But they smote upon me like a funeral peal, sad and dirge-like. When the ringers left off, it seemed as though a dull pain were removed from my heart.

As church-time drew near, I became more agitated, I trembled in every limb, and was thankful that the poor widow had so much to do that she had not time to notice her guest.

Had I miscalculated my own strength! O John, could I without betraying myself look on your face again?

I clenched my teeth, I drew in my breath, I clasped my hands, I tried to quiet myself, for I felt that I must spring

up and rush from the cottage to the mansion, there to declare,—

“I am thy wife; oh take, me home!”

John, I had nearly done it—nearly brought misery within those peaceful walls, but that the little grave, the stone cross with the word “Ellen,” rose up before me, and gave me strength, and gave me better thoughts. I would not harm thee or thine. My love should conquer still. “O love, O love, help me to conquer love through love itself!”

I was not afraid of being recognised. In my coarse stuff dress and homely shawl and widow’s veil, I was sufficiently disguised; besides, none would trace in the faded bent woman the Ellen Carmichael of so many years ago.

I know not how I reached the church. I found myself there amongst the poor people in the aisle, and the widow sat next to me. She touched me when you entered, but she need not have done so; I knew it already. I knew it the moment that your shadow fell across the threshold, though I was not looking. I felt your presence, and I knew that you and I were in spirit still united.

As you passed up the aisle, you brushed against me, and for a moment I touched your hand. You did not perceive it; and as I touched it, a thrill ran through me, and I trembled violently. My neighbour thought I was going to faint. But I was not.

The service began; and I remembered that I was in the house of God; that His presence was around us, filling all

space, and that you and I were shadowed beneath the Almighty wings, and folded within the everlasting arms. And deep peace fell upon me. It was no human peace. No human peace could so have inspired me, and so raised my soul.

And then for the first time I lifted up my eyes and looked upon you. You were less changed than I, yet still I could trace the signs of a great sorrow unforgotten, and I knew that I was in your memory still. I saw you smile as your wife looked up at you, it was a kindly smile, but not the one that I remembered; that was for me alone.

I wonder how I was so calm—unnaturally calm, it seems to me now; but the strength was given to me that I might bravely fulfil my purpose.

I looked upon your wife, a frail and fragile being, and I knew that she was not long for earth. I wished her no harm; she had done me no wrong. Perhaps—O John, I thought perhaps she might die, and then—and then I might tell you all, and Ellen might come back at last. I did not wish it, John, I only thought it; but the voice from the altar seemed to speak to me alone in clear, condemning tones, “Thou shalt do no murder,” and I started like a guilty thing.

And so the service passed, and I sat as a statue, calm and still, taking my last look of you on earth. And I seemed not to belong to this world, but already to have ascended into heaven.

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And as the organ played, I heard the heavenly harps sounding, and angelic voices singing in chorus, "Peace, peace."

Still in my waking dream I followed down the aisle and through the porch, and along the narrow path leading to the churchyard-gate. And there, in helping your wife into the carriage, a rosebud that was in your coat dropped. I stooped and picked it up unobserved. I have it now, and it will lie with me in my coffin.

I saw you drive away, and then I told the widow that I would rest awhile in the churchyard, and follow her presently.

And so she left me, and the people went away all joyful to their homes. I saw my brother pass; his wife was leaning on his arm, a kindly woman, one whom I could love. She little knew that within a few yards of her stood her husband's broken-hearted sister.

When all were gone away, I sought out the little grave, and there I sank down, my strength, my inspiration, my bravery were all gone. Earth had returned to earth, and I wept bitterly.

It was over now; I should never see you more. Never! —never! oh, cruel, bitter word! Never! I could not go away—I could not.

But a voice within me said chidingly:—"O thou weak woman! where is thy boasted love?" And still I wept, and as the tears fell down, my selfish heart grew patient. My

love had won the victory,—my love for you had conquered all of self within me.

From the river-bank I gathered a bunch of blue forget-me-nots, and laid them on the grave; and then I went on my way home. I did not dare to trust myself to go back to the widow's cottage. I must see no one in Craythorpe, or even yet I might betray my secret.

And so she thought me thankless; but I was not. I have blessed her night and morning for her kindness to me in my sore distress; and in the last great day I shall rise a witness to her gracious deed, when the Great Judge shall say unto his wondering servant:—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

* * * * *

And now the end has come. I have not many days to live, and my thoughts go back to the happy past, and I think of the days, John, that you remember as well as I, and all sorrowful memories fade away. There seems to have been a dark bridge connecting that time with this. I travelled over it; but it is swept away now, and I see it no longer. I am happy; my thoughts are with you; and I die blessing you with my latest breath. I commit my Doris to your care, if for her sake it should ever come to pass that these papers should be placed in your hands. For my sake, John, take care of Doris.

* * * * *

My blessing!—my last blessing! John, beloved husband,
my blessing.

* * * * *

And here ended the poor wife's story.

The strange past came like a flash of lightning to Mr. Lynn's recollection. He remembered the bent and tottering stranger,—he remembered the bunch of flowers upon his children's grave, and how he had wondered who had laid them there.

O, Ellen!—Ellen!

And now the end has come. I have not many days to live, and my thoughts go back to the happy past, and I think of the days, John, that you remember as well as I, and all our sweet memories fade away. All that seems to have been a dark bridge connecting that time with this. I travelled over it; but it is swept away now, and I see it no longer. I am happy; my thoughts are with you; and I die rejoicing you with my latest breath. I commit my story to your care; if for her sake it should ever come to pass that these papers should be placed in your hands. For my sake, John, take care of Dorcas; she is all that is left to me.

CHAPTER II.

AN OLD FRIEND'S WELCOME.

THE Eastern Counties line runs through rather a desolate display of landscape. Essex is certainly not a favourable specimen of English scenery, though here and there one finds a pretty village with picturesque lanes, and a river winding through it. But such villages are not on the line of railroad, they lie far away from it; therefore let us hope they may long be spared the effect of its progressive influences, despite the seeming illiberality of the sentiment.

Passing from the Shoreditch Station, through, or rather over miles of houses, the line takes its way through suburban retreats, and out into more decided though flat and uninteresting country.

A wondrous sight those miles and miles of houses, closely packed together, tall, dark, gloomy; and one enters into a calculation of what might be the average allotment of dwelling room to each of the three million inhabitants of the wonderful city,—of how much coal is burned to send up so much smoke, that rolls itself into clouds that hang in dingy canopies between earth and heaven, never aspiring to soar aloft

to their whiter and more transparent brethren: indeed, they appear to have a decided antipathy to fleeing away in an upward direction, their genius being not to rise but to extend themselves, and so they stretch away, north, south, east, west, over turret, steeple, tower, palace, cathedral, abbey, bridges, and river; short and tall chimneys puffing up reinforcements in the shape of voluminous columns that, twisting into fantastic wreaths, crown the brows of the mighty metropolis.

And yet, perhaps, these unappreciated smoke-clouds give us some of the most marvellous sunset effects it is possible for a painter to behold; when the sun battles through the haze and turns so silver mist the opposing force, or tinges with crimson, gold, and opal tints the edges of quaintly-shaped masses, or pierces through them with a sudden burst of brightness, sending a whole shower of gold motes athwart their leaden grey; or separates them, letting in a dash of blue so clear and transparent that it gleams like the purest sapphire; or ray crosses ray, or is turned out of its course, and the dusky cloud atmosphere is illuminated, and one beholds a glorious confusion of light and colour—an effect wilder and more wondrously dazzling than the most bewildering of Turner-esque pictures. And below, the city lies in gloomy silhouette, with spectre towers and spires, and phantom bridges, reflected phantom-like in the burnished river. And the heavens seem raining down a shower of golden dust as though in mockery of the toil of those who labour out

their lives for what the unseen hands are flinging so lavishly away.

The train goes on. Passing through miles and miles of houses and of outskirts, until one becomes prophetic, and prophesies of the future when railways shall so have intersected this small island of ours, and towns so risen up along the lines, that there shall come to be one vast London extending through the breadth and length of the land, with not a gap of country, save here and there a stunted park as breathing hole for the lungs of the mammoth city;—when green fields and waving corn, and breezy downs, and “giant oaks,” and “desert caves,” shall be belongings of the past; whose being, chronicled by the poets, will seem so incredible that future generations will regard them as appertaining to a mythic age;—when there will no longer be a ruined castle to carry us back to chivalrous, if somewhat barbarous times; when Stonehenge itself may be applied to building purposes, —for we are coming to the utilitarian age.

Progress!—progress is the war-cry now; all men are enlisting, or being enlisted—for in many cases the form is passive—under its banner. The past stands no longer as a lighthouse, casting long gleams of light across the flood: its lantern is out of order, its oil is spent, and there is no one left to trim it. The future stretches out a giant hand towards us, holding a flaming torch and luring on to an Eldorado, crying, “Come unto me, for I alone am to be trusted; I will lead you on.”

The sage is left behind, for prophets have arisen; and yet, in spite of prophets, the Age of Faith has not yet come.

But Doris, as she travelled through the winter evening, pondered upon none of these things.

It was too dark to see anything beyond the high white walls that the snow-covered banks occasionally reared on either side. At the stations the lights fell upon the white bushes, and Doris saw that the snow was beginning to acquire some depth. The train moved more slowly, and the time dragged very heavily. Should she ever reach her journey's end?

At every station she looked out eagerly, and at last she saw the name she so desired to see painted up in large letters,—and the porter passed along calling out the name of the place.

Doris got out with her little bundle.

“Any luggage, ma'am?” inquired the porter, instinctively.

“None; I want to go on to Linton, can I get a conveyance of any kind?”

No, there were none at the station.—How far away was Linton?—A matter of three miles or so. And it was beginning to snow again. Doris was perplexed. Still, if she knew the way—she was used to the country, and did not feel afraid; she should not meet many people, and it was not late.

She inquired whether it was a good road. A good road all the way, and tolerably direct. So she thought she could

manage it. The snow was falling very gently indeed, she hoped it would leave off. And she set out on her way to Linton.

She walked for more than a mile without meeting anyone but a solitary labourer going home after his day's work. He said "Good-night," as he passed her, and she, accustomed to country ways, bade him "Good-night," too.

Then she went on. She was a little puzzled now, for she came to a point where the road divided, and could not determine which way to take. She looked around for a sign-post, but there was not one to be found.

Then she strained her eyes in hopes of discovering some dwelling near, where she might make inquiries. But it was too hazy for her to see far; she must make up her mind to go one way or the other, and take her chance of meeting with some one to set her right if she were in the wrong path.

So she took the turn to the left, which fortunately proved to be the one that led to Linton, as she soon afterwards learned from some children whom she overtook, and who were trudging contentedly along towards the village.

"How came it they were out so late?" Doris asked.

"They had been spending the day with their grandmother; their holidays had just begun."

"Where did they go to school?"

"To the school in the village."

"To Mrs. Howell's?"

"Yes."

The children were surprised that a stranger should know the name of their teacher.

“Is Mrs. Howell at home now? asked Doris, for a sudden fear fell upon her lest she might be away for her holidays.

“Oh, yes; it was too cold for her to go away at Christmas.”

Doris started. Christmas! She had forgotten that it was close upon Christmas.

“Will you show me where Mrs. Howell lives?” she said, as they entered the village.

“Yes, they should pass the house on their way home.”

Since leaving the station the road had gradually ascended, and raised above the valley stood the village of Linton, with its grey church, whose unfinished tower was perhaps more beautiful than if it had been in a state of completion; an air, too, of interest attached to it in consequence of the legend that with its founder's fall, it, too, was doomed to remain a partial ruin, over which the twining ivy has crept, as though nature had had pity on the work that men had ceased to care for. The children stopped at a small garden gate.

“You must go up to the house and knock; Mrs. Howell is in, for the light is coming through the cracks in the shutters.”

And the children went away, and Doris, following their directions, knocked at the cottage door.

It opened into a good-sized room, half-parlour, half-

kitchen, with a square of carpet on the tiled floor, and a thick cloth hearth-rug, the work of Mrs. Howell's own hands, before the fire-place. The fire was blazing brightly, and sending a cheerful flickering light upon the polished oak dresser, and making the plates and dishes glitter; and it shone upon Mrs. Howell's tea-caddy that stood as a centre-piece in front of a gorgeous tray, flanked by a large Bible and a work-box, both in green-baize covers. There was a curious old table, almost as black as ebony, with carved legs and a couple of drawers in it, and a high-backed chair of similar date and pattern. A wide sofa covered with chintz stood underneath the window, the kettle was singing on the hob, and a large tabby cat sat meekly purring upon the hearth-rug.

Doris peeped in through the half-open door and shivered for the first time; for the warm pleasant picture within made her feel how cold it was outside. She stood pondering how to make herself known.

"What is it?" inquired Mrs. Howell, seeing a figure in dripping garments standing in the half-light.

"Have you forgotten me, Mrs. Howell?" said Doris.

"I can't see you where you stand," replied Mrs. Howell, "so I can't tell in that way; but I seem to know your voice. Come in," and as she spoke she drew Doris into the house and closed the door, for the night air was blowing in so keenly that the large tabby cat looked round reproachfully, as if to intimate that she was by no means accustomed to

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And the children went away, and Doris, following their directions, knocked at the cottage door.

It opened into a good-sized room, half-parlour, half-

kitchen, with a square of carpet on the tiled floor, and a thick cloth hearth-rug, the work of Mrs. Howell's own hands, before the fire-place. The fire was blazing brightly, and sending a cheerful flickering light upon the polished oak dresser, and making the plates and dishes glitter; and it shone upon Mrs. Howell's tea-caddy that stood as a centre-piece in front of a gorgeous tray, flanked by a large Bible and a work-box, both in green-baize covers. There was a curious old table, almost as black as ebony, with carved legs and a couple of drawers in it, and a high-backed chair of similar date and pattern. A wide sofa covered with chintz stood underneath the window, the kettle was singing on the hob, and a large tabby cat sat meekly purring upon the hearth-rug.

Doris peeped in through the half-open door and shivered for the first time; for the warm pleasant picture within made her feel how cold it was outside. She stood pondering how to make herself known.

"What is it?" inquired Mrs. Howell, seeing a figure in dripping garments standing in the half-light.

"Have you forgotten me, Mrs. Howell?" said Doris.

"I can't see you where you stand," replied Mrs. Howell, "so I can't tell in that way; but I seem to know your voice. Come in," and as she spoke she drew Doris into the house and closed the door, for the night air was blowing in so keenly that the large tabby cat looked round reproachfully, as if to intimate that she was by no means accustomed to

the cold wind pouring in upon her sleek sides in that manner.

"I declare it's Miss Carmichael," said Mrs. Howell; "but how you've grown since I saw you. And——" here her eye fell upon Doris's pale weary face, — "you're in trouble, my dear; come, sit down."

And Mrs. Howell drew off the wet cloak.

"Oh, but you're wet through; your boots are soaked with snow."

And Mrs. Howell, placing Doris in the great arm-chair before the fire, began to busy herself in making her guest comfortable.

"I'll bring you down a pair of dry shoes and stockings, and some wraps, for you must have your dress off;" and Mrs. Howell disappeared up the staircase that found its way into the kitchen-parlour.

Presently she returned with an assortment of garments, in which she arrayed Doris, and made her lie down on the sofa, rolling it closer to the fire.

"There, don't speak," she continued, as Doris made one or two ineffectual attempts to say something, which ended in a fresh burst of sobs. For Doris's courage, which had borne her up bravely through the perils and difficulties of her flight, had forsaken her now that she had safely reached the haven. After the fatigue and excitement through which she had passed came a reaction, and the more she tried to restrain her tears, the faster they flowed.

“Never mind, dear, don’t try to stop crying, it will do you good. You shall have a cup of tea to warm and comfort you, and then you’ll feel better, and you can tell me what’s the matter.”

Mrs. Howell was a good nurse, and well knew what refreshment there is to both body and spirit in a good cup of tea. So she set about preparing the homely meal.

She opened a corner cupboard, and took therefrom a little black earthenware tea-pot, two delicately washed china cups and spoons, a loaf of bread, and a pat of butter.

The kettle was already boiling, the shining tea-caddy was in requisition, and the tea was soon made and put to stand whilst Mrs. Howell toasted a round of bread; and then, all things being ready, she poured out a cup of tea for Doris, and one for herself. True, she had had her tea long ago; but what woman is there to whom a cup of tea ever comes amiss? Besides, she knew that Doris would enjoy it more in company than if she were taking it alone.

Nothing was said; but Doris, lying on the sofa, sipping her tea and looking into the cheerful fire, left off crying and began to feel revived. She ate the toast heartily, for she had tasted no food since morning.

“What a comfortable place this is,” said Doris, looking round.

“Yes, comfortable enough,” returned Mrs. Howell, surveying her parlour-kitchen with satisfaction; “but you’ve been used to grander rooms than this of late, or I’m mistaken.”

Mrs. Howell's quick eye had noted the texture of Doris's dress and cloak, and she had drawn inferences therefrom.

"It's a better room than my mother had, so I ought to be content with it," sighed Doris, and again the tears were on the point of bursting forth.

"Your mother was a lady, and I'm not," said Mrs. Howell.

"My mother looked upon you as one of her best friends," replied Doris.

"True enough, so she did, poor lady; but that made none the less difference between us in one way. I don't mean but in another we're all alike, and the truer a lady is, the less difference she'll feel between herself and those below her; but in this world there are stations, and they thrive best who keep to their own, and don't go pushing into what isn't theirs and doesn't suit them."

Mrs. Howell poured out another cup of tea for Doris, and sat watching her. She did not like to ask the questions that were uppermost in her mind; for one she felt was already answered by Doris's black dress.

But Doris, having finished her tea, laid back her head on the sofa pillow. Her eyes involuntarily closed, and in a few minutes she was fast asleep.

"Poor thing," said Mrs. Howell to herself, as she put away the tea-things, "she's regularly tired out."

CHAPTER III.

HOW MR. LYNN KEPT CHRISTMAS.

MRS. CARMICHAEL, or rather Mrs. Gresford, had been Mrs. Howell's lodger for many years, and it was in her care that she had left Doris when she went on her sorrowful journey to Craythorpe. Mrs. Howell, too, had nursed her through the illness that came upon her after receiving Mr. Carmichael's letter. In fact, Mrs. Gresford's two friends, each a true friend in their respective spheres, had been Mrs. Chester and Mrs. Howell, so that Doris's first thought in her perplexity and distress was to flee for refuge to her mother's humble friend, who had known her all her life.

It was five years since they had seen each other, for, after Mrs. Gresford removed to another village "for work," as Doris had told Joyce, Mrs. Howell was persuaded by some relatives in the eastern counties to take up her abode nearer to them. And there she had been ever since, her little school flourishing, and herself living in greater comfort than she had been able to do in the south.

Mrs. Howell had been up for some time, and breakfast was on the table. She looked at the clock, and finding that

it was half-an-hour beyond her usual breakfast-hour, she went softly upstairs to the best bed-room, a sort of state apartment, where Doris lay fast asleep beneath a canopy of white dimity, pure and spotless as the snow outside. And counterpane and pillows were as white as the curtains, and so was Doris's pale face, quite white enough to earn the name of the "snow child" that Mr. Chester had given her.

"Poor lamb," said Mrs. Howell, gently disposing the curtain so as to shade her face from the light, "she looks scarce older than she did five years ago. I won't disturb her, better let her sleep on a bit."

And Mrs. Howell descended to her breakfast, and ate it wondering where Doris had come from. And then, still meditating upon the subject, she took up her knitting, and knitted away, every now and then listening if she could hear sounds betokening the appearance of her guest.

At length Doris's footstep was heard on the stairs, and Mrs. Howell bade her good morning. Doris was refreshed and sobered by her night's rest. She had accomplished her flight, she was tolerably safe in her hiding-place, and now what was to be her next step? She had acted so far entirely from impulse, and now she must sit down quietly and consider how far she had been right and how far wrong. And still, though she felt doubtful of the course she had taken, she felt that her impulse was true, that she had fled from something that was in some way false, though she could not understand it. She shrank from the false element

though she could not define it, she knew not what she disbelieved, but she had an intuitive perception that somewhere truth was wanting. She had, however, entire confidence in Mrs. Howell's good sense, so, after breakfast, seating herself, as she had done many a time as a child, at Mrs. Howell's feet, she told her story.

She told her of the last five years; of her mother's death, of her Uncle Carmichael, of Aunt Lotty, of Joyce Dormer, and of the strange revelations of the last few days. And Mrs. Howell listened attentively.

"Child," she said, "are you sure that you have done right in leaving those that are kith and kin to you?"

"I don't know," answered Doris, sadly; "they didn't know me as you do, and you were my mother's friend."

"And they are your mother's relatives."

"Relatives," said Doris: "of what use are such relatives as Uncle Carmichael. How he *can* be my mother's brother I do not understand, for never were two people more unlike."

„He has taken good care of you since her death."

"And why? Because he has found out about my mother's marriage; and having some spite against Mr. Lynn, he wants to revenge himself by getting the fortune from little Archie Lynn for his sister's child."

"And Mr. Lynn's."

Doris shivered. "I don't feel like a daughter to him," she said, "I can't help thinking of my mother and what she

suffered. I never saw Mr. Lynn till a few months since, and people can't get up filial feelings on the spot. I don't believe in it and I can't go and live at Lynncourt. I should never be happy, I should be thinking all the time that it ought to have been my mother's, and if it had been she wouldn't have died. It would be like dancing upon her grave to go and live there in ease and luxury. No, I could not do it. I'd rather go back to my old life and work for my living as I used to do. Oh, Mrs. Howell! let me stay with you and help you to teach or to do anything. I have been used to work, you know."

Mrs. Howell shook her head.

"I'm afraid that won't do. We must think it over."

"But you won't betray me, Mrs. Howell?" exclaimed Doris, impetuously; "you won't turn me away; you'll let me stay till I've thought it all over, and feel right about it?"

"Turn thee away!" said Mrs. Howell, fondly stroking Doris's hair. "No, dear; stay as long as you like; only, couldn't you send word to them, who must be so anxious about you?"

"I might write to Joyce," said Doris, musingly; "but, then, they would know where I was from the postmark."

"I have a sister in London: she would post the letter from there."

"That will do; and I must write to Mr. Chester also. He will help me, if anyone can."

"Ay, that he will," returned Mrs. Howell; "that's well

thought of. Mr. Gabriel is as wise as a judge, and he'll know just what ought to be done."

"Wiser, perhaps," thought Doris. And she wrote her letters: one to Joyce, that told of her safety without disclosing her place of refuge; another, a longer, fuller one, to Mr. Chester, telling him of all that had happened, of her doubts and difficulties, and begging him to come to her; "for, you know, dear old Gabriel," she said, "that my mother made you a sort of guardian, and, as you have plenty of money, and can go where you please, do let it please you to come to the poor 'snow-child,' who has fled out into the snow, and is shivering all alone in the cold world." Which latter clause was purely metaphorical, as Doris was sitting comfortable by the fireside, with Mrs. Howell blandly contemplating her from the opposite corner, and meditating like Aunt Lotty, on the possibility of a wedding, with Mr. Chester and Doris for bridegroom and bride.

* * * * *

The sun went down early, though he had not done much to fatigue himself during the day; perhaps he found it too cold for him, and his rays might get frozen on their way down—at any rate, he found it stiff and awkward work, and he was by no means on such good terms with the earth as in the jolly summer time, though he was nearer to her now. But some friends are best friends at a distance, and so it might be with the sun and earth—who knows? He might

not like her so well when they were more thrown together. And when he sank to rest, the little warmth that had tried to penetrate the cold atmosphere departed, the thermometer fell many degrees below freezing-point, and the robins, hiding their heads under their wings, tried to fall asleep without any uncomfortable fears as to the morrow's food. The water in the pools began to harden, and even in some cold rooms ice was found in the jugs, so that, altogether, regular Christmas weather was coming on, for, somehow or other, people seem to think that Christmas is scarcely Christmas without a good hard frost. People would certainly have a seasonable Christmas this year: there was snow on the ground and it was freezing.

Mrs. Howell was decorating the dresser and the mantelshelf with sprigs of holly, for it was Christmas Eve! Christmas Eve! What would they be doing at Green Oake and Lynncourt?

Green Oake and Lynncourt had amalgamated. Aunt Lotty was sitting in her arm-chair, listening almost as eagerly as the little Lynns themselves to the stories that Joyce was telling them. The younger child was seated on Joyce's lap, whilst Archie, on a footstool close by, was leaning his elbows on his knees, and gazing earnestly with his large dark eyes into her face. He was as one fascinated. Gradually he edged himself nearer and nearer, and then removing his elbows from his knees, he held tight by Joyce's dress, as though he feared she would escape, and his large

eyes seemed to grow larger and larger as the interest of the story increased.

And where were the heads of the houses?

In the small inn of a remote village in Devonshire, sat Mr. Lynn and Mr. Carmichael; they had just arrived after a hard day's travelling. The two men who had not spoken to each other for more than twenty years. Both intent now upon the same object—the recovery of a lost relative. Had the old feeling passed away? Had they forgiven each other their trespasses? Had at last the daily prayer been uttered aright?

Calm, stern, determined, with his thin lips more compressed than ever, Mr. Carmichael took the lead; whilst his companion, upon whose haggard countenance traces of the emotion of the past night were visible, passively assented to all his arrangements. They had been, after some difficulty, accommodated with a private sitting-room, for the resources of the inn were not great. And hither the landlord was summoned to be cross-questioned as to the events of the week, it being supposed that he would be well up in all village gossip.

“Did he remember Mrs. Carmichael and her daughter?”

“Of course he did; everyone in the place knew and respected them.”

“Then he knew Miss Carmichael by sight?”

“Yes.”

“Had she been in H——during the last few days?”

“He thought not, or he should have known of it.”

“Was he *quite* sure that she had not been there?”

“He could not say; he had been a good deal occupied, and had heard nothing of such a thing. It was just possible, he wouldn’t say for certain, that she had not been.”

Mr. Carmichael hesitated; he looked at the landlord, who was a great overgrown man, with a somewhat stupid but honest countenance. Mr. Carmichael decided to make use of him.

“The gentlemen had come down on a matter of importance. The landlord could be of use to them. Might they depend upon him?”

The landlord of the small inn suddenly became great in his own eyes. Certainly, they might rest assured that their confidence would not be misplaced. And the landlord, swelling with incipient dignity and curiosity, listened.

“The stout gentleman, in the glossy broadcloth and massive gold chain, was Mrs. Carmichael’s brother.”

“Like enough; he had always thought she belonged to gentlefolk. And now that he came to look more attentively at Mr. Carmichael, he had a vague recollection of having seen him before. Yes, he remembered now, it must have been at the funeral.”

“He, the landlord, might remember that, after Mrs. Carmichael’s death, her daughter went to live with some of her mother’s relatives?”

“Yes; the landlord had heard it, and he had heard say what a fine thing it was for her, and he hoped she was well and happy, for she was too tender a young lady by far to go on living as she and her mother had been living. They’d had a deal to suffer, they had.”

Here Mr. Lynn shrank farther back into a corner of the sofa, and pressed his hands to his forehead; and Mr. Carmichael observed, somewhat sternly, that they did not wish to hear anything of that nature. Whereupon the landlord bowed obsequiously, and begged pardon.

“All they wanted was present information. Miss Carmichael had suddenly left her relatives, and it was believed that she had returned to some of her friends in Devonshire.”

“They’d no friends of their own sort here,” said the landlord; “they’d only been here four or five years, and there was no one about that she’d be likely to come to unless it was Widow Wilson at the Heath Farm; she used to be very kind to them, and it was many a fowl or a newlaid egg Mrs. Carmichael had had from there, to say nothing of new milk.”

Mr. Lynn groaned in anguish. And he had been living in such luxury. And again Mr. Carmichael found it necessary to check the landlord’s reminiscences.

“How far was the Heath Farm?”

“Not over a quarter of a mile; he would step up himself, if Mr. Carmichael pleased; he should be more likely to find

out if the young lady had been there than Mr. Carmichael would, if so be as she had any reason for not wishing him to know."

The force of which argument Mr. Carmichael appreciated, and accepted the landlord's offer accordingly. And the landlord went on his fruitless errand, for no Miss Carmichael had been there or had been heard of. And inquiries in other directions were equally unsuccessful. However, Mr. Carmichael determined to see Mrs. Wilson himself the next day; and discovering that she had really spoken the truth on the previous evening, he determined to go to the village where his sister had settled on her arrival in England. And so he spent Christmas-Day in vain endeavours to find the lost sheep. Miss Carmichael had neither been heard of nor seen, and he returned to H—— to rejoin his companion. Mr. Lynn, feeling that business matters might be safely entrusted to his brother-in-law, had remained behind: his Christmas-Day was spent in wandering through the little village where his wife had lived, in picturing her life, her trials. He had seen the room in which she died, and now he stood beside the humble grave where she rested from all her sorrow. Yes, it was all over now,

All the aching of heart, the restless unsatisfied longing,
All the dull deep pain, and constant anguish of patience.

And he could never tell her what he too had suffered, for the dead hear not. As they left us, so they lie, and the tomb has closed upon their griefs, their wrongs, their

agony. None can make reparation to them for injustice done, none can be forgiven by them or forgive in turn. For the battle is over, and the Death Angel, sounding his trumpet over the hard-fought field, proclaims a truce—a truce that ends not until a louder trumpet sounds, and the dead, small and great, are summoned to their last account.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY. — DORMER-LAND.

MY story still runs on. I sit in my little porch-room and meditate, with my feet on the fender, and my eyes staring into the fire as if I could see therein, as in a fiery mirror, the scenes that make the chapters in my story, and I feel myself an involuntary authoress to whom incidents are brought by the outside world, which are laid down before me, giving me nothing to do but to write them out fairly in my book, and number the pages. And when I have copied them out, and read them over, they fit in so neatly that it surprises me to find how well I have arranged them. But I believe all writing to be a sort of inspiration, and people go on and on, and words shape themselves into sentences, and sentences into paragraphs, and they scarce know how it has all come, or what they write until after it is written. Some subtle influence causes the hand to move the pen ere one is fully conscious of thought. How wonderful is everything connected with thought and intellect, how impossible to define or explain! Marvellous as is our physical structure, especially when taken in connection with the adaptation of

the different organs to their different uses; of sight for seeing, of hearing for drinking in sweet sounds and words that thrill to the very heart, of speech for giving utterance to thought and idea; yet still more wondrous is our mental mechanism, our immaterial organization. How little we understand of ourselves, how little time or attention do we devote to that greatest of all studies—if we may believe the poet—Man himself. “Fearfully and wonderfully made.” Who shall try to reveal himself unto himself and not feel this? Not stand in awe as he strives to comprehend his inner life, his being, the never-ending principle within him, his after-life? All that he gets at best, after perhaps an almost life-long pondering, is a momentary flash that ends in darkness. He cannot see far enough,—clouds that he cannot pierce hide from him the revelation of himself.

But why these perplexing thoughts? Why do I not content myself with chaos? Alas! the thoughtful mind cannot be satisfied with chaos, it fain would struggle into order. It seems to me that man, the microcosm, is yet in that chaotic mould in which the world lay when it was “without form and void,” and that the Voice has yet to come saying, “Let there be light.” Oh, that the Spirit might move on the face of these dark, overwhelming waters, and so regenerate the intellect, that, seeing, we might see and understand, and satisfy our intellectual cravings!

Ah! how I ramble off when once I begin these speculations. It is well that Doris is not to peep into my diary just at

present, or she would think that quiet Joyce Dormer's senses were taking leave of her. Therefore, I will return to the thread of my discourse, and let such digressions alone.

It is a fortnight since Doris went away, but I feel no uneasiness about her now, since the letter I received assures me that she is safe and with a friend. Who can it be? Can Mr. Chester know? It is so strange that I have had no answer to my letter. I ought to have heard from him before now.

Mr Carmichael is possessed with the idea that I know where Doris is, though I have told him over and over again that I am quite ignorant upon the subject, and have answered all the questions he has thought fit to ask me, with the most perfect equanimity. Yet, still he doubts me. He has not much faith in the truthfulness of others. Perhaps because he is not particularly truthful himself. Possibly this is the reason why truthful people are oftenest deceived; they judge others by themselves, and believe others, until they find themselves mistaken, to be of their own standard. But people can't go on trusting for ever. Trust and distrust require an exercise of discretion, and blind trust is a weakness productive of much evil in spite of a certain halo of faith that hovers over it. Once upon a time Mr. Carmichael's trust in his neighbours might have been upon a larger scale. And then, *I don't trust him*. But I have grounds, and he has none. He's told me several untruths,

and, of course, after that one can't quite go on believing in people. Oh dear! I hope I shall always be truthful; I *know* I am at present. Still, Mr. Carmichael does not thoroughly believe me, though he pretends to be satisfied at the present time. I showed him Doris's letter. The postmark was London: but London is a wide place. Mr. Carmichael is there now, and is employing detectives; but, so far, without any result.

I am sure I am as anxious as anyone else can be that she should return, for I perceive that Aunt Lotty is fretting sadly and Mr. Lynn is quite unnerved. Indeed, he is altogether shattered by recent events. I do wish that Doris could see him. She is the person of all others to soften the fearful shock that he has experienced. He finds a ready sympathiser in Aunt Lotty, but that is not like having his own daughter to console him. Ms. Lynn has confided his wife's story to Aunt Lotty, and Aunt Lotty has confided it to me. And it works into my tale like an episode that casts a deeper shade of interest round my heroine. But my heroine is lost, and my hero is abroad.

For Mr. Chester is the hero of my story and always has been. The hair talisman has had nothing to do with it. He is the horseman in the cloud of dust that I saw in my reveries by the dear old river long and long ago, and I, like Sister Anne, have waved the signal, and he is coming to help in the hour of need. Yes, I have a presentiment that through him Doris will be brought back to us, and then of

course the nursery legend will be carried out: the horseman is the old lover who comes and marries Fatima, and thus I shall find a legitimate novel ending to my romance.

Aunt Lotty mourns first over her husband's sister, then over Doris, then over Mr. Lynn. Her tender heart is torn, and she goes about with a gentle, depressed air. Poor Aunt Lotty! how much capacity there is in her for love and tenderness, and how little it has been drawn forth! The little Lynns have already become quite attached to her, and it is pleasant to see how quickly she understands them. Truly the evening of her life promises to be its happiest time. She cannot get over the mention of herself as one whom the poor wife could have loved.

"It will make me doubly fond of Doris when she comes back," said she; "and to think, dear, that the poor thing saw me there in the churchyard, and I never to have known it, and she Mr. Carmichael's only sister. We're surrounded by wonders, dear. Never did I think that I should come to be connected with such mysteries. Everything was so straightforward and unromantic in the Dormer family; but one never can tell what one may marry into. Marriage is a lottery!"

Though how Aunt Lotty intended her last remark to apply to the subject under discussion I cannot say. It was one of Aunt Lotty's staple quotations that linked itself on with matrimony, as a word rather than as an abstract idea.

Yes, the Dormers *were* matter-of-fact and straight-forward

in all their ways, as Aunt Lotty truly observed. I never heard of anything approaching romance in connection with any of the family. They lived, married, died, and were buried in the most orthodox manner. They were never very rich, nor very poor. They lived in comfortable houses, and some of them kept a carriage, but they never went beyond one horse, and the one horse being of the steadiest description, there was no fear of accidents or hair-breadth escapes that are occasionally productive of results bordering on the romantic. They never met with any extraordinary piece of luck, nor on the other hand, with any very great misfortune. They never broke their arms or legs as other people did, though this was not so much owing to good fortune in time of danger as simply to their never being placed in any situation in which such catastrophes were likely to occur. In fact, "to live and die," virtue of course filling up the "space between," was about all that could have been summed up as matter for a biographical sketch of one of the family.

You may see their graves at Credlington, and will find that they mostly lived to the same age, or if they died young, they generally died before they had attained their fourth year. And it is recorded on all their tombstones that they died "in hope," which most people appear to do, though whether their hopes will be realized is not for us to determine.

In fact, a general sameness pervaded the Dormer family,

though at the same time a great deal of quiet happiness reigned in it, which was satisfying as long as one's mind was willing to confine itself within a narrow circle, and had taken no covert glances into a newer or a larger world.

My own life had partaken largely of the Dormer character as far as outward circumstances and influences were brought to bear; but I was an only child, and left very much to my own devices; so journeying daily in the realms of fiction I discovered in my books that there were other paths not quite so smoothly beaten as those that the Dormers trod—paths leading into wilder, fresher regions; and so, though my outer life flowed peacefully as a summer-stream, my inner life was like a torrent that, escaping from its native mountains, dashed over rocks and precipices and strove to make its way to the unknown ocean.

Sometimes, when I had paused to consider some passage that had particularly struck me in my reading, my father would say to me,—

“Joyce, child, of what are you dreaming?”

And then my thoughts would travel back from the Utopia that lay outstretched before me, and settle down quietly in Dormer-land, and I used to laugh and answer,—

“I have been far away to a grand castle; but you have knocked it down, and I have to come back to the old home at Credlington.”

And a very happy home it was. And it will be a green spot to look back upon all my life, whatever may befall me.

But nothing is likely to befall me, for am I not a Dormer? Here are all kinds of romances happening around me, and I pass unscathed through the midst of them; Aunt Lotty and I being Dormers, are passive agents, so slightly acted upon that we are after all but mere spectators of the drama played out around us. The Dormer atmosphere effectually acting as a non-conductor.

And so I remain calmly at Green Oake, and the little porch-room sees me day after day noting down the affairs of others in my diary, and so weaving them into a tale that I perversely enough persist in calling "Joyce Dormer's Story."

CHAPTER V.

TWO DAYS LATER; FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY.

I WAS in the drawing-room alone yesterday afternoon, Aunt Lotty having gone up to Lynncourt. (What a blessing Lynncourt is to her!) I had opened the piano, and my fingers were lazily rambling over the keys. Now I played a bit of one of Mendelssohn's wordless songs, then a mysterious snatch from Beethoven, and then I strayed into a voluntary of my own, wherein I seemed to hear voices striving to utter their thoughts, but I could not understand them. Now a deep, unexpected chord of wonderful beauty soothed me so inexpressibly that I struck it again and again, now loud and now soft, as though I would make it speak and tell me all its message. But in vain; I could not interpret its meaning. So, disappointed, I rushed into a wild melody, wherein, alternately, the treble and the bass took up the strain as though they pleaded against each other; and yet, though seemingly at variance, the cause they pleaded was the same. And still they called to me, and still I listened, and my heart strove to understand, but all in vain! What was their meaning? Portent of joy or sorrow?

Suddenly the door opened, and a gentleman entered. It was too dusk for me to see who it was. I thought from the height that it must be Mr. Lynn; but I was soon undeceived when a voice said,—

“You see I have brought my own answer, Miss Dormer.”

Then I knew it was Mr. Chester. I was thankful that it was dark so that he could not tell how glad I was to see him, and I tried to steady my voice as I replied,—

“I was afraid that my letter had not reached you.”

“It did not reach me as soon as you expected, for I had gone away from Rome for a few days; and when I returned and found it awaiting me, I thought the best thing I could do was to set off to England immediately, especially as there was a letter from Doris also, begging me to come to her.”

How foolish I am! My heart sank down in a moment, and gave no more leaps. It was quiet enough now. It was not *my* letter that had brought him, but Doris's; of course it was; what could be more natural? I ought to have thought of it. I think I should have done, only I was so glad to see him that I thought of nothing else.

“Then you know where Doris is?” I asked, after a little pause that I made in order to recover myself.

“Yes.”

“Where is she?”

“That is Doris's secret,” returned Mr. Chester, with a smile.

And then I was vexed; so I said, in, I am afraid, a little tone of pique,—

“And *yours* too.”

“And mine too,” replied Mr. Chester, gravely; then he added, “do you think I ought to betray my trust?”

Just what I had done about the drawing. Mr. Chester would not think me improved. Why will my impulse be ever getting the better of me? All that I could do was to say,—

“No.” And then I added, “Perhaps I ought not to have asked; but I am very anxious about Doris.”

I meant it as a little apology for my hastiness, and he understood it.

“Miss Dormer,” he replied, “how long will you continue to think that I am finding fault with you?”

There was such a cordial frankness in his tone, that I could not help being impulsive again.

“As long as I have a conscience, I suppose; for when my conscience accuses me, I feel that people must accuse me also.”

And this time impulse succeeded better.

“You need not fear much fault-finding as long as you listen to so good a Mentor.”

It was pleasant to hear a word of appreciation from him, though I knew he was thinking of Doris all the time; and then for the first time it flashed upon me that possibly he

had already seen her; and so asked him whether this were the case. But he answered,—

“No; I came straight to you, for I wished for your advice.”

He had come to Green Oake first! Hush, thou foolish heart! It is only because he is so anxious to do everything for the best for Doris.

“I think Doris should return to us—to her father,” I said. “If she knew how much he is suffering, how ill he looks, she could not stay away. It is her duty, too. Her mother appears to have looked forward to it, and to have wished it. And yet, Mr. Chester, there is something I don’t quite understand. It seems that, under certain circumstances, the packet would never have been given up. That it was not sent as a last bequest from Mrs. Gresford to her husband, but that his receiving it depended upon some emergency arising in which Doris needed a protector. It is this point that has so startled Doris; and the only way in which I can account for her objection to going to Lynncourt, is that she thinks her mother did not intend her to go if it could be avoided; and so she has determined, as long as she has health and strength, to render Mr. Lynn’s assistance unnecessary.”

“I partly gather the same idea from her letter,” returned Mr. Chester; “but stronger than this feeling seems to be her distrust of Mr. Carmichael and her determination not to take advantage of anything that he has a hand in. She

tells me she cannot define this feeling, nor give any reason for it, but that it has weighed upon her mind ever since she came to Green Oake.

"It has, I know," I replied. "The very first night she was here she told me of it."

"And you have had a similar feeling, and so have I," said Mr. Chester. "So I suppose there is something in it, though it seems rather uncharitable, since we've none of us any grounds to go upon."

"Mr. Chester, I think—I believe—"

And there I stopped.

"Well, what do you believe?"

"I don't know—I—perhaps—I——" And again I paused.

"Not very lucid," said Mr. Chester, laughing. "What is it, Miss Dormer, that so perplexes you?"

I laughed, too, and yet I wished I had not begun my sentence, for what right had I to be bringing an accusation against Mr. Carmichael without any proof? And yet in my own mind I was convinced that he had opened Doris's packet.

"I think," I said, "that I ought not to have begun my sentence. Will you consider it unspoken?"

"Certainly, if you really wish it," replied Mr. Chester.

And then I inquired if he had yet opened the packet that Mrs. Gresford had given to him.

"Yes; but is it not for me. The outer envelope was addressed to me, but enclosed I found a letter for Doris, as you see."

And he put his hand into his coat-pocket. He started; the letter was not there.

"I could have been certain that I had it with me, but I suppose I must be mistaken, and that I put it back into my portmanteau. Yes, it must be there," he said, as if trying to assure himself of a fact that he wished to believe.

But I could see that he felt uneasy. At any rate I did, for I felt that on this letter probably depended the happiness of the two involved in this sorrowful affair. Doubtless it was an appeal from the mother to the daughter.

"Oh! it cannot be lost," I exclaimed.

"I trust not," was Mr. Chester's rejoinder. "I think it would, after all, have been safer with you."

"Oh, no; then it would have been certain to——"

What was I thinking of?

"Oh, surely, Mr. Chester, you will find it—you must find it; everything depends upon that letter." These last words I spoke very earnestly, for suddenly a flood of light poured into my brain, and I was dazzled and confused, and knew nothing plainly but the one idea that stood out clear before me, "The packet must not be lost."

Mr. Chester looked at me in some surprise.

"Miss Dormer, will you not trust me?"

"I have nothing to trust you with."

"Pardon me, there is something."

"Nothing tangible. It is so indefinite. I have no right—I dare not—I ought not to speak."

“For Doris’s sake,” pleaded Mr. Chester.

But I was firm.

“No, Mr. Chester, not even for Doris’s sake at present, though the time may come when I can speak more freely.”

I saw by the firelight, for the fire that had been smouldering had suddenly blazed up brightly, that Mr. Chester looked disappointed. But I could not help it. I was determined that he should not draw my thought from me. For it was but a thought, an inspiration, perhaps a revelation; but it was too vague to shape into words just yet.

So I only shook my head when he was going to say something more about it, and then I asked him about his journey, and when he thought of returning.

“Not until I have settled this matter about Doris.”

“I am afraid,” said I, “that I have not helped you much.”

“Yes,” he answered, “you have satisfied me that my own view on one point is correct. Doris must be persuaded to return to Craythorpe. Lynncourt of course must be her proper home.”

“And her inheritance,” said I.

“That need not follow.”

He had evidently considered the point. I knew he would not care about the fortune, in spite of what Mr. Carmichael had said. But he did not know how the property was settled.

“It is so willed,” I answered, “that the eldest child *must* have it.”

“And this is Mr. Carmichael’s way of making an heiress of Doris.”

“Yes; and I believe she would have been far happier without it. And yet but for this fortune I don’t believe that Mr. Carmichael would ever have brought her here.”

“I don’t, either.”

And then we talked on, and our subject naturally was Doris, until suddenly he said,—

“Have I found my way into your story yet, Miss Dormer?”

I was by no means prepared for the question; yet I managed to answer it readily.

“You have, Mr. Chester. You and Doris are my hero and heroine at the present crisis.”

And if I had been discomposed by the abruptness of the question, I think he was surprised at my reply, for he looked a little confused. He saw that I had discovered his secret. I was glad to let him know that I had.

“You see,” I went on, “that Doris’s talisman has worked successfully if you still desire to be a hero.”

He did not speak at once, but after a little he said,—

“I thought you did not believe in talismans.”

“But you see this one is beginning to make me credulous. I suppose Doris is an enchantress, and has fascinated me to do her bidding.”

“Are you sure that it is Doris’s work?” asked Mr. Chester, eagerly.

No, I was sure of nothing of the kind; but I was not going to tell him so, therefore I replied, evasively, (alas! is my truth going?) —

“Who else could have done it? Did she not insist upon having the hair to twist together, and who knows what spells she may have used?”

“I thought you *gave* the lock freely.”

“So I did; for Doris wanted it, and what use to me was a lock of hair that could not be fastened on my head again?”

Oh dear! where is my truth ebbing to? Had I not given it because he had asked for it; and I, like a simpleton, had fancied that he wished to have it?

Mr. Chester made no reply; but he opened a large locket that was attached to his chain, and took therefrom the curious knot that Doris had so deftly twined. He carefully untied the fastening that bound the ends of the hair; then, with a skill that surprised me, he separated the dark hair from the light; the dark lock he replaced in the locket, the light one he held towards me.

“I have never felt satisfied about keeping it,” said he, “and now I restore it to its rightful owner.”

My cheeks burned with mortification; I knew he had never cared for it, he preferred having Doris’s alone. Mine was forced upon him, and he could well have refused it. I took the piece of hair, and was about to fling it into the fire; but he held my hand back.

“No, not that,” he said.

But with a great effort I wrenched my hand away, and threw the hair into the flames.

“There,” said I, “that is the best place for it.”

He sprang forward, but it was too late: the flames had devoured it.

Then I stood silent, all my passion was gone; and I wished that I had said nothing about the talisman. But it could not be helped now. And Mr. Chester turned to go away.

“I will write when I have seen Doris, and I will try to persuade her to come back to Craythorpe.”

I asked him if he would not wait to see Aunt Lotty; she would be at home before long; but he said his time was limited, and he must go. Then we shook hands, and said “Good-bye” to one another. But when he reached the door he came back to where I was standing.

“Miss Dormer,” he said, “I have been very foolish. Will you pardon me if I have caused you any annoyance?”

“You have not annoyed me,” I replied, in a low tone; “it is I who have been wrong.”

“No, no,” he returned, “you misunderstand; it is I who am to blame. But we must not quarrel,” he added; “we have still one interest in common — Doris.”

“Yes;” and I felt the subtle imp that I so tried to withstand knocking at the door of my heart. But I shut it fast it should not enter.

“And we part good friends?” and he held out his hand.

“Quite good friends,” I replied, giving mine in return.

So we shook hands again, and Mr. Chester went away. And I threw myself on the sofa, and burying my face in the cushions, tried to think over quietly his visit.

And I recalled all I had said about the talisman, and thought of the day when Doris had made it; and putting the two together I began to be afraid that Mr. Chester would have reason to think me untruthful as well as hasty.

But what does it matter what Mr. Chester thinks? Probably he never thinks at all about a person he so little cares for. Nevertheless, I felt very miserable. And then Aunt Lotty came in, and seeing me lying down, she thought that I must have a headache.

“And you have been crying too, dear,” she said, “and that is the worst thing in the world for a headache, though I could have cried over and over again with one.”

But I told her that I had no headache, that I felt a little tired, but that none of us need cry now, for I had good news for her. Mr. Chester had been here, and he had had a letter from Doris, and knew where she was, and was going to persuade her to come back to Craythorpe.

“And he’ll do it,” responded Aunt Lotty; “but she won’t stay long at Craythorpe, for that wedding is sure to come about. And Joyce dear, you’ll make a very pretty bridesmaid.”

CHAPTER VI.

MR. CHESTER'S ARGUMENTS.

JOYCE DORMER went to her bed that night repeating Aunt Lotty's words:—"That wedding is sure to come about." Of course it was; had she not been prophesying it to herself ever since Mr. Chester's first appearance; so what need was there for it to cause her so much consideration? She would dismiss it from her thoughts. She ought to be very glad that Mr. Chester was going to marry Doris. She thought she *was* glad, she tried to persuade herself of it, and then she fell asleep.

Mr. Chester travelling in the night-train had also *his* reflections, and they were as follows:—"She does not care for me, that is plain enough. What a fool I have been to think of such a thing! I will go back to Italy, and stay there until I have forgotten Joyce Dormer."

He rang the changes on these few sentences as he lay back in the carriage endeavouring to go to sleep; but in vain, sleep would not come, or if it vouchsafed its presence for a moment it would not stay, and he woke with a start, muttering,—

"She does not care for me."

As he passed from Shoreditch he saw not the miles of houses any more than Doris had done; neither did he indulge in musings on the city and its inhabitants. It was in comparative darkness as he whirled along; the lights were out in most of the windows, and the street-lamps alone stood as sentinels through the night watches. A mighty shadow had fallen across the city, Midnight had stretched out her wings and reigned in solemn silence; and from her throne crept forth Fear and Murder and Robbery and Wrong, that revelled in the night-time, and hated the light of day. But Midnight was blind and could not see them, so knew not whither they went nor what evil was doing. She heard the startling shriek of agony, the wild cry of terror, the wail of misery, the smothered burst of anguish; but she could give no help, for she was blind, and Midnight wept upon her stately throne, for she felt desolate and powerless. And still she listened, and through the darkness softer sounds struck on her strained ear; the gentle breathings of quiet sleepers; the prayers of those who prayed for others as well as for themselves; the voice of thankfulness that another child was born to earth; the song of holy triumph that floated upwards as a soul released from all its cares was carried in angelic arms unto the gates of heaven. Then Midnight was comforted, and felt that in her reign good mixed with the evil, and that all was not the blackness of despair. But her rule grew feebler, and the grey dawn told of the approach of a gorgeous Monarch from the East. He

was at some distance yet, so Midnight struggled to maintain her seat a little longer on her tottering throne.

And still in darkness, Mr. Chester reached the station, at which Doris had arrived about a fortnight before. He found, as Doris had done, that there were no conveyances to be had; so he walked to the little town near, and there procured a bed for the remainder of the night, and early the next morning drove over to Linton. He made his way to Mrs. Howell's.

The good woman uttered an exclamation of joy on seeing him.

"Oh, sir! but I'm glad you're come; here's Miss Carmichael drooping like a snow-drop, and I can't do anything to raise her spirits, and I don't know where her friends are, so I can't send to them, and we thought the letter could not have got to you, or surely you'd have answered it."

"I've come myself, and that is better, is it not, Mrs. Howell?"

And at that moment Doris, who had caught the sound of voices, flew down stairs, crying out,—

"Oh, Gabriel, Gabriel, I am so glad to see you."

"But I'm not glad to see you looking so ill and so unlike yourself, my poor snow-child," said Mr. Chester, looking compassionately on Doris, who was whiter than ever, and her large, dark eyes seemed unnaturally large and lustrous.

"You'll tell me what to do, Gabriel?" and she clung to his arm. "I cannot go back to Craythorpe; you don't think I need go there?"

"We must talk it all over, Doris," he answered; "and then you will be ready to do what is best."

Doris did not know; she could never feel that it was best to go back to Craythorpe and take poor Archie's property from him, whatever Gabriel might think.

"Perhaps we could arrange that the property may be left as it is."

Her face brightened.

"Could we? Uncle Carmichael said that nothing could be done to prevent my having it."

"I thought," returned Mr. Chester, smiling, "you told me that you did not trust Uncle Carmichael; that you did not believe in him; that you had a feeling that, whatever he said must be false, and now you are turning round and are inclined to doubt me and to believe in him."

Doris looked up; one of her old smiles came over her face, and she laughed.

"Now, dear old Gabriel, that is just what you used to do, making me turn round against myself whether I would or not. But I don't think I should ever be happy at Lynncourt, even if I could get rid of the fortune, and so disappoint Uncle Carmichael. It's just to spite Mr. Lynn, and not on my own account, that he wants me to have it."

"I have guessed that much myself, Doris. But, nevertheless, Lynncourt is the proper place for you. You ought to be with your father."

"But I can't feel as if he were my father," said Doris.

"It is so strange. Besides, my mother was not there, and I feel that I cannot live in a place where she ought to have been."

"But, Doris, this is childish. Consider the circumstances. How could it have been otherwise? And if your mother suffered, Mr. Lynn has suffered also, and still suffers. Think what a terrible revelation this has been to him."

"Is he ill?" asked Doris, abruptly, "Have you seen him?"

"No; but Miss Dormer tells me how changed he is."

"Then you've been to Green Oake and have seen Joyce. What does she say? What does she think?"

"She thinks that you ought to return at once to Craythorpe. We agreed entirely upon that point."

"Then you've been quarrelling about something else?" and Doris looked up inquiringly.

"I hope not," answered Mr. Chester, somewhat evasively.

"But something like it," pursued Doris. "I wish Joyce would learn to like you, Gabriel. I've tried my best to make her."

"You see she does not," he returned, quietly. "I think you had better leave off trying."

"Perhaps if you liked her a little better," suggested Doris. "I do not think that would have any effect. But we will not discuss Miss Dormer's likes and dislikes. I want to settle your affairs. What do you say to my taking you back to Craythorpe?"

"I cannot go," said Doris.

„But, Doris—”

“No, I cannot live at Lynncourt. I shall never be happy there, and I don’t want to see Mr. Lynn again.”

“Nor Miss Dormer, nor Aunt Lotty?”

“I wish you would call her Joyce, Gabriel. It seems to me that you dislike her as much as she dislikes you.”

“Joyce, then; don’t you wish to see her?”

“Yes, I do. Oh, how I wish that you and I and Joyce could go far away and leave all those people, and live together somewehre. Oh, why did my mother let Uncle Carmichael know anything about Mr. Lynn; she would not have done so had she known how unhappy it would make me.”

“Doris,” said Mr. Chester, remembering the packet, “I have a letter for you. Your mother gave it to me some years ago to take care of for you. Will you promise to abide by what she tells you to do in that letter?”

Doris sat for a few moments without speaking, with her hands over her eyes.

Then she said, very slowly, “I will.”

“It is in my portmanteau,” said Mr. Chester. “I ordered the man to drive to the best inn he could find in the village, so I suppose I shall find it there.”

Mrs. Howell directed Mr. Chester to the principal inn in the place.

“And what about Miss Carmichael, sir?” she asked, as she followed him to the garden-gate.

“I think she ought to go back to her friends, Mrs. Howell.”

“So do I, sir and I hope you’ll persuade her to do it. I don’t wonder she feels as she does, poor thing, when she looks back upon her mother’s sorrows and hardships. I’m fain almost to side with her in one way, and yet I can’t help seeing that the right course is for her to go back to her own kindred.” And Mrs. Howell opened the gate.

“I shan’t be long before I’m back again,” said Mr. Chester. And he went away.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. CARMICHAEL IS PERTURBED.

JOYCE DORMER had sent up a note to Mr. Lynn to tell him of Doris's safety and of Mr. Chester's visit. And the next morning brought Mr. Lynn to Green Oake to hear all that Joyce could tell him.

But Joyce could not tell him where Doris was, only that she was with a trusty friend, and that Mr. Chester would bring her home as soon as possible.

"And who is Mr. Chester?"

And Joyce set herself to explain; Aunt Lotty adding notes and comments as she went on; and finally taking up the subject herself.

"Mr. Chester is the most charming person I ever met with," said Aunt Lotty; "and I'm sure you'll like him, and you will not object to him in the least; that is, I'm sure I hope you won't, for he and Doris have set their hearts upon each other, and I should be sorry to see them disappointed. It's a sore thing to disappoint people, you know."

Joyce thought Aunt Lotty premature, as Mr. Lynn was evidently quite unprepared for such a phase of affairs.

To gain and lose a daughter in so short a space of time was what he had not calculated upon. However, he said nothing, either for or against, and Aunt Lotty rambled on, and Mr. Lynn appeared to listen, but his thoughts were far away.

Then the post came, and there was a letter from Mr. Carmichael. He had been harassed and hurried, and worn to death almost, and had failed in all the attempts that had been made to find a clue to Doris. She certainly was not in London, or he should have discovered her, and in what direction to try he knew not. He had inserted an advertisement in the *Times*, which was not to be withdrawn without further notice from him. He did not see what further steps could be taken at present; therefore he intended returning home by that afternoon's train, as he felt quite ill and knocked up.

"And he'll hear news that will make him well again," commented Aunt Lotty.

But Joyce was not so sure of that when taken in connection with Mr. Chester.

And in the afternoon Mr. Carmichael did arrive, and he did look very ill; his complexion was very leaden, and there was a wandering look in his eyes that was by no means natural to them. He was not in the best of tempers, for Mr. Carmichael was not a man who liked to be beaten. He was mortified at having to give up finding Doris. There was something ignominious in being outwitted by a mere girl.

His temper was not improved by Aunt Lotty's burst of information, for Aunt Lotty had scarcely been judicious in her commencement—but, then, she was not a judicious person, and she usually contrived to act unadvisedly with the best of intentions; therefore, she had greeted Mr. Carmichael on his entrance, as follows:—

“Well, I have good news for you. Who do you think has been here?—Mr. Chester! And Mr. Chester knows all about Doris, and where she is, only he would not tell Joyce; but she's all safe, and he's gone away to bring her back.”

Now if there was anything particularly unpleasant to Mr. Carmichael, it was the connecting of Doris's name with Mr. Chester's. So he became irritable at once.

“What business has Mr. Chester to know anything of Doris? Besides, I thought Mr. Chester was in Rome. Doris isn't *there*, I suppose?” and Mr. Carmichael looked at Joyce.

“No,” said she; “Doris wrote to him, and he came over to England.”

“Oh! Doris wrote to him, did she? And why need Doris have written to a stranger?”

“But Mr. Chester is not a stranger; she has known him all her life,” replied Joyce.

“He is neither her father nor her uncle,” retorted Mr. Carmichael.

Which facts being so self-evident, Aunt Lotty was emboldened to put in an observation.

“Of course he is not, or he would not wish to marry her.”

Mr. Carmichael was exasperated: he turned angrily to his wife.

“If you can't say anything pleasant, don't say anything at all. Mr. Chester will never marry Doris if I can help it.”

Joyce thought that Mr. Carmichael could not help it; but being more judicious than Aunt Lotty, she did not say so. And again Mr. Carmichael addressed her.

“When was Mr. Chester here?”

“Yesterday evening.”

“He came to tell you that he had heard from Doris?”

“Yes.”

“Had he seen her?”

“No.”

“Why did he come here first?”

“To ask what I thought Doris ought to do.”

“And what did you advise?”

“That she should come back to us.”

“And what might Mr. Chester's opinion be?”

“He said that Lynncourt was the proper place for her.”

Mr. Carmichael struck his hand violently upon the table.

“Lynncourt?” he repeated. “Yes, that is it—I knew he

was after Lynncourt. I told you how it would be when he came to know that Doris was an heiress. A man does not come careering home from Italy for nothing."

"But he seemed to think that Doris needn't take the property if she did not wish it."

Mr. Carmichael laughed, sneeringly.

"Oh! and so you believed him! No, no; he's too cunning for that. He's doubtless found out that the property is secured against any romantic sentimentality of that kind."

Joyce felt convinced that Mr. Chester had found out nothing of the sort, and that he, moreover, had never given a thought to the property, and would not care about it; still, Mr. Carmichael would not believe her if she told him so, so she made no answer.

"What else did Mr. Chester say?"

"He said that he had in his possession a letter given to him by Mrs. Gresford many years ago, that he was to keep until Doris was in need of assistance. This letter he intended to give to her now."

Joyce was watching Mr. Carmichael intently, to see what effect her communication would have; but she was not prepared for the change that came over him. His face turned livid, and he stared at her fixedly. She could see that he was greatly agitated, though he endeavoured to control himself. Joyce went on.

"He had not this letter with him: indeed, I am half afraid that he has lost it."

And still she watched Mr. Carmichael attentively. The fixed look in his eyes relaxed, and a momentary gleam of hope shot into them. Still, his hand shook visibly as he rested it upon the table. He leaned back in his chair.

"I am not well," he said, faintly.

Aunt Lotty rose hastily.

"Dear, dear, he has overdone himself in London. Joyce, dear, see! can he have fainted?"

No, he had not fainted; but he was very heavy and languid, and seemed to have very little power left.

"Joyce, ring the bell."

And Mr. Carmichael was conveyed to his room, and a doctor sent for.

"Was it anything dangerous? Would he get over it?"

"He would get over it; they need not be alarmed about this attack, though another might be feared."

Aunt Lotty was indefatigable; she sat up all night watching her husband. In the morning she knocked at Joyce's door.

"He is better, but his mind wanders about some letter that is lost. I did not quite hear what you were saying last night, for I had fallen asleep; not but that I heard a good deal, for I can hear people talking when I'm in a doze: but that just happened to escape me. What was it? But if you would come and speak to him yourself, I think he'd be easier, for he's asked for you once or twice."

So Joyce went into the darkened room.

"It's Joyce," said Aunt Lotty.

Speaking slowly, and with some difficulty, Mr. Carmichael contrived to say,—

"You think the letter is lost?"

"I don't know, but I am afraid Mr. Chester thinks so."

"Thank heaven!" muttered Mr. Carmichael, and he sank back on his pillow.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOGIC ENDS IN LOVE.

MR. CHESTER searched his portmanteau carefully. He took out everything; he examined everything; he opened every package; he scrutinised every letter and paper; he turned out all his pockets: but no letter was to be found. Could he have lost it? He had it before he started from Rome; of that he was certain. He remembered also putting it into the pocket of his coat. And then—and then——No, it was of no use; he had not the slightest recollection of it afterwards. Again he searched the portmanteau, examined the lining, but all to no purpose. He must return and tell Doris that he had lost her mother's letter.

Doris was sitting where he had left her. Her eyes were closed; her mouth firmly set, and her hands clasped. She did not move when she heard Mr. Chester's step; neither did she open her eyes. She was communing so earnestly with herself that she could not be interrupted in her meditations. So Mr. Chester sat down on the sofa beside her, and did not speak.

Presently, without unclosing her eyes, she said, "Give it to me."

And she sighed, for she felt like a criminal about to receive sentence. She was going to hear a decree from which there was no appeal; indeed, her own promise had rendered it irrevocable.

"Give it to me," she repeated, in a tone that was almost inaudible.

"Doris," said Mr. Chester, "I cannot find it. I am afraid that it is lost."

The girl opened her eyes and sat erect, with her earnest gaze bent upon him.

"Then I am free. I may do as I please. It seems like some mysterious dispensation to leave me to my own free choice in the matter. This is no accident; I do not believe in accidents; everything is designed for some end or other. If that letter is really lost I shall know that I am right in not returning to Craythorpe."

"But suppose it should be found, Doris?"

She looked perplexed for a moment and then answered, —

"I shall still believe that there was some reason for its being lost. I shall know that my steps are guided by circumstances over which I have no control. I must accept facts as they stand."

"But this is mere fatalism——"

"Perhaps so; but, Gabriel, I am so tired and so bewildered that I am glad even to have fatalism as a guide."

And she looked up at him with such a weary look that Mr. Chester felt he could have stooped down and kissed

her, as he had done many a time when she was a little child, but Doris would be nineteen in a day or two, though he could scarcely believe it. And a feeling of compassion stole into his heart. Poor little Doris, how unhappy she seemed; and he himself was not particularly happy at the present moment. How glad he would be to get away to Italy and not see any of the Green Oake people again. Which Green Oake people he might have reduced to one person, Joyce Dormer, but so he chose to word it. And Doris would be glad to get away too.

"I have decided what I am going to do, Gabriel," said Doris, shaking back her hair, that had escaped from its fastenings, whilst a change came over her face and she suddenly lost the weary look.

"Well?"

"I have a talent for drawing, you know."

"Don't be conceited," replied Mr. Chester.

"I'm not conceited. I know I have; and, besides, you have told me so often and often."

"And you intend to be an artist and paint away at Linton?"

"No, I don't. I'm not quite so aspiring as that. I'm going to do wood-cutting. I should succeed well enough, and make quite enough to live upon. Mrs. Howell has a sister in London whose husband does wood-cutting, and wants a pupil. I think, Gabriel, that I am not suited to live without any work after having worked all my life till

now. I think I shall miss getting my living as I used to do: it will separate me so from the past."

"And what will Mr. Lynn say to this? Remember, Doris, he is your father. You are not free to act in this matter."

"Surely after so many years he would let me do as I pleased. What can he care for a daughter whom he has never known? He has done nothing for me so far, and I don't wish him to do anything now."

"Has that been his fault? And, Doris, he does care for you; he is grieving over you now. Can you not love him for your mother's sake? Can you not follow her example, and sacrifice your own feelings to spare him?"

Doris hid her face.

And again Gabriel felt the same strange compassion for the girl dart into his mind. And he thought of her words, "If you, and I, and Joyce could live somewhere together." But Joyce was out of the question; besides, he wished to forget her; but he and Doris, they seemed to belong to one another. He took one of her hands.

"Doris," he said, "do you think me worth caring for?"

"Worth caring for?" asked Doris, in amazement; "to be sure I do. I care more for you, Gabriel, than for any one in the world. What should I do without you? There is no one who knows so much about me as you do, no one that I have known so long. Of course I care for you."

"You don't quite understand me, Doris. Do you think

you care so much for me that you would be willing to leave every one else and go with me to Italy?"

"Oh yes, Gabriel! I should like it above all things, and you could teach me as you used to do. But it would have been pleasanter if you could have liked Joyce and Joyce could have liked you, and then you two could have been married, and I should have been as happy as the day is long with you both."

She did not understand him yet, she had looked upon him so long as her guardian and protector, almost as a second parent. So he said, gravely,—

"That is not what I mean. I have no one to care about me now, and I feel rather sad and lonely sometimes. Will you be my wife, Doris?"

It had never entered into her head. His wife! Gabriel's wife! She would have laughed at the idea if Joyce had suggested it to her. But she did not laugh now, she was so perplexed, so astonished.

"Gabriel!" was all she could say.

"I am in earnest, Doris."

"But what can have made you think of it? I never should have thought of it."

"Can you not think of it now?"

"I don't know, Gabriel."

"Do you love any one else, Doris?"

"No."

"Well then, listen. This is the only way in which I can

help you. I am a lonely man in the world. My mother is dead, and I have but few relatives. Those I have are all scattered, and have interests of their own; so there is no one for me to care for but my little snow-child, whom I have known and loved so long, and who links me with the past. And you, Doris, cannot bear to be torn from that past and planted anew in a fresh soil; in a fairer garden it may be, but without any of the old props to cling to. We are both in a manner desolate; can we not make a home far away from all these troubles, and keep the past as a precious memory that will dwell painlessly with us throughout our lives. Remember how your mother begged me to take care of you the last time I saw her. Can I fulfil her wishes better than by being your protector through life?"

Doris sat listening earnestly. There was no flush upon her face; she was considering calmly Mr. Chester's speech. When he had ended, she spoke.

"Do you wish it on my account, Gabriel? Are you thinking of me?"

"I am thinking of myself, Doris," he answered.

"Are you quite sure you wish it? Are you sure you like me better than any one you have ever seen?"

Her eyes met his without flinching.

"I am quite sure that I wish it."

He did not answer her other question.

"I should not have supposed I was the sort of person you would care for, Gabriel," she continued.

“Why not?”

“Because it never entered into my head that you would. That seems a foolish reason, perhaps; but I cannot help thinking that I should have had some sort of idea, some perception in all these years, if I had been the kind of person to suit you. I am afraid it is on my account that you are thinking of this.”

“No, I am not, Doris.”

“It appears stranger almost to me than everything else,” she replied. “I think you must be mistaken, Gabriel. If you really think, if——”

“If what?” said Mr. Chester. “Tell me honestly, Doris, anything you like to say.”

“If I were quite sure that I like you well enough in that way, I mean—but I’m afraid I don’t, Gabriel—I would try. But I never thought about it, and I should not wish you to be unhappy.”

“I could not be unhappy, Doris. We used to be happy enough together in days gone by.”

“But I was a child then,” she returned, seriously. “I am older now—I am a woman, Gabriel. I have grown very old in these last few weeks. I was growing old before that, Gabriel. For we had such a struggle those last few years. Oh, Gabriel! And poverty makes one feel so old—so very old.”

Mr. Chester took both her hands in his and looked sadly at her.

“And you never told me, Doris.”

“My mother would not let me. I would have written again and again to you, for it would not have been like charity to be helped by you. But she would not let me. She asked Uncle Carmichael to help her, and he would not—he would not, Gabriel; and do you think I can ever forgive him? I don’t, and I never shall. You don’t know what I’ve felt since I’ve been at Green Oake. Something like a tigress kept in a cage. I’ve been wanting to spring out all the time and get away. But Joyce was such a gentle keeper that I had not the heart to leave her. If Joyce could only go with us I would go at once, Gabriel; for now I am away it seems to me that she reminds me of my mother, though it never struck me before.”

“She bears a strong resemblance to your mother,” answered Mr. Chester. “I always wondered that you had not perceived it. It is one of those strange chance likenesses that one does sometimes see between people who are not related.”

“Yes, I see it now. Oh, Gabriel! if it had only been Joyce that you had liked instead of me!”

“But then I should have had no claim to help you out of all your difficulties.”

“No,” said Doris, meditatively.

“But you have not answered my question yet, Doris.”

“I do not know how to answer it. Are you quite, quite sure that you are in earnest, Gabriel?”

“Quite sure.”

Doris closed her eyes as if to shut out everything, and once more to commune with herself. She was silent for a time; then she rose, and putting her hand on Mr. Chester's shoulder, she said, softly,—

“Gabriel, I have made up my mind. I will go with you.”

CHAPTER IX.

CONSCIENCE MAKES COWARDS.

IT was a fair and frosty morning. You could feel it the moment you awoke, and you could see it the moment the blind was drawn up and revealed the window panes covered with starry spangles. And you could hear it, too—that is to say, there seemed to be a crisp, crackling sound in the air, that comes only on frosty mornings.

The early sun did not melt the tiny icicles that fringed the window ledges, nor the frozen drops of dew that had turned white on the blades of grass and on the leafless hedges where the spiders had been busy spreading nets to catch the shining diamonds that dropped from the Frost-queen's garments as she passed along. The trees were crusted over with silver, and glittered and sparkled in the sunlight, softening in the distance into the blue haze that gathered around them, and which melted into the rosy sky, whose blushes grew ever fainter as the sun rose higher. And men, seeing the black bare woods so transfigured, said that a hoar-frost had come on and revelled in its beauty; but nurses told the children that the fairies had been planting sugar forests in the night; and the children believed it, as they

believed in the crock of gold that is to be found where the rainbow touches the earth, and as they believed in all other legends and myths believed in in the Wonder-age, that is the fairest age upon earth. For, is not the world an Eden then, and the forbidden fruit untasted?

The robins looked quite comfortable in their brown coats and red vests; they were quite winter-birds, and were singing still, though all the other birds had forgotten their notes. Cheerily through Christmas time had the robins sung their carol, and earned the crumbs that they were bold enough now to beg from door to door; and few were so hard-hearted as to send them away unrewarded.

Within doors the Frost-queen made herself also felt. She seemed to have swept the house out in the night, and made everything look fresh and clean. And as for the fire, though one would think that it must be her natural enemy, she had certainly lent it a helping hand, or why did it blaze and sparkle more brightly than an other days? Also she must have been whispering happy thoughts into the hearts of the dwellers in the houses, or what could make them look so pleasant and cheerful this morning? Even the poor little boy with the chilblains did not blame the Frost-queen for bringing them—indeed, he never took into account that she had anything to do with them. He looked out of the window, wishing that they were better, so that he might have a slide on the pool with his brothers. He was so afraid that the frost would go before his chilblains were well.

Doris came down to breakfast under the Frost-queen's influence, though Mrs. Howell attributed it entirely to Mr. Chester's coming.

"I knew he'd make everything right, if any one could; and I'm so glad, Miss Carmichael, that you're going home. Depend upon it, it's the right thing, and just what your mother, poor lady, would have wished."

Yes, Doris was going back to Craythorpe. Mr. Chester's arguments had been successful. He had brought so much to bear upon the subject that had never before occurred to her preoccupied mind, that he had won his point, and perhaps that very evening she would see Joyce again, and they would have a long chat in the little porch-room. Would Joyce be surprised at all she had to tell her? She was sorry that Joyce did not quite like Mr. Chester. "But she may think better of him now," mused Doris, "for my sake."

The Frost-queen had not been so benign to Mr. Chester as to others, though perhaps he, of all in the little village of Linton, needed her invigorating influence most. He had believed on the previous evening that he should open his eyes on a new world, and that the old world would have passed away. He believed that he could forget one object in the pursuance of another, deeming that new plans, new ideas, action, change, and new interests, would bring forgetfulness. He did not take into account that through the world there runs no Lethe. We may smother our regrets in the whirl

of active life, we may drown our sorrows in excitement, we may even for a while keep down remorse; and we may build up fresh hopes, and try to hang a curtain between us and the past. But the whirl of active life will not go on for ever; a hush must sometime come. And in the silent hour of midnight, or in the ghastly grey of the chill dawn, Regret, like a phantom, will haunt us, and shake a mocking finger at our inability to undo the past. And when the mad torrent of excitement has swept by, old memories and old sorrows will be left high and dry upon a desolate shore, and we shall grieve and grieve until the tide again flows over them. There is no Lethe on this side the dark river.

And Mr. Chester looked graver than he had done the day before.

* * * * *

Aunt Lotty sat by Mr. Carmichael's bedside and ministered to his wants, filling up the intervals with the endless knitting, and not daring to speak unless spoken to, lest she might irritate the invalid. For Aunt Lotty's perceptions were sharpened in any case of illness, and her sympathetic heart corrected her somewhat defective judgment. It was necessary that he should be kept perfectly quiet, the doctor said, and then all would go on well.

"Letters?" said Mr. Carmichael, in a querulous tone.

It was about the time of the arrival of the Australian mail.

"I thought you were asleep, or I would have given

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It was about the time of the arrival of the Australian mail.

"I thought you were asleep, or I would have given

them to you before," answered his wife, bringing several letters to him, amongst which was one with a foreign post-mark.

Mr. Carmichael's eye eagerly noted it, and Mr. Carmichael's trembling fingers closed upon it. The opening was a somewhat difficult task, it dropped from his hand. His wife giving it to him again, asked,—

"Shall I open it?"

"No!" replied the sick man, abruptly, as he once more essayed to tear open the envelope, in which he finally succeeded. Then he steadied his hand to hold it whilst he read, and as he did so he glanced at Aunt Lotty; and Aunt Lotty perceiving his movements in spite of the knitting, softly moved towards the window, drew the blind half-way up, and seated herself so that Mr. Carmichael could not see her.

And Mr. Carmichael, thus left to his own devices, began to read his letter. He was not very expert in making it out, his eyes rather failed him, and losing his place continually, several times he had to begin again; but by dint of perseverance he at length mastered the contents, and they brought relief to his mind. The writer said,—

"I have made minute inquiries as directed, and find that Henry Bargrave died four years ago, being a man over eighty years of age. His wife is still living, but is infirm and at times loses her memory; she, however, well remembers the loss of the Albatross, with all the passengers on

board. Mrs. Gresford and her child were amongst the number, they were both drowned. The child was at that time not a year old, its name was Doris. She remembered nothing especial about it; it was like all other babies, nothing very remarkable. She remembered, too, Mr. Gresford's return after he had been thought dead so long, and his distress and despair on hearing of the loss of his wife and child. He went away, she fancied, to South America, and she felt sure that her husband had once or twice heard from him; but that was long ago; she did not know now whether Mr. Gresford were living or dead."

The writer had obtained a list of the passengers in the ill-fated vessel. They were all drowned. Only four or five of the crew were saved; they contrived, after tossing about in an open boat for three days without food or water, to attract the notice of a vessel bound for Sydney. They had suffered fearfully from hunger and exposure, and had seen their comrades die around them. They reported that the Albatross went down, and that the captain and all on board perished.

Mr. Carmichael's head fell back on the pillow; the effort had been great, and he needed rest after it, but his mind was in a more comfortable state than it had been; still there was a vague fear upon him of which he could not divest himself, and he should have to wait in restless suspense until it was dispelled or realized. He was half afraid that Joyce had a suspicion of his fear. He could not quite

make out Joyce, there had been something strange about her of late, as if she suspected something. Perhaps it was only an idea of his own; perhaps he might be unnecessarily harassing himself; nevertheless, his mind was harassed, and he lay in a state of mental unrest, longing that his illness would pass away, so that he might take active measures to assure himself of all he wished to know. Presently he opened his eyes again and listlessly surveyed the letters lying beside him. He stretched out his hand, and took one up, quite by hazard, for he had not particularly noticed it, he merely saw that it was in a handwriting not familiar to him. Some circular, probably; he could not make out the post-mark. He was putting it down again, when one of those irresistible impulses that sometimes come over people prompted him to look at it again, and as he did so he intuitively felt that it contained something of interest, and with some little difficulty he managed to open it. It was but a short note, and the writing was clear and legible, consequently he read it more easily than he had read the Australian letter.

It was from Mr. Chester, written before he left the station-town for Linton. It was merely to inform Mr. Carmichael that he hoped to bring back Doris to Green Oake the following evening.

“That will be to-day,” commented Mr. Carmichael. “He had somewhere in his possession a letter from her mother, which he had no doubt would assist him in persuading Doris to return.”

Mr. Carmichael gave a half-groan.

"What is it?" asked Aunt Lotty, hastily coming to the bedside.

"Nothing," replied her husband; "go away."

And Aunt Lotty retreated to the window again and went on with her knitting.

Mr. Carmichael reconsidered the passage.

"He had somewhere in his possession: somewhere—it was vague, he had not actually found it; it *might* be lost."

Mr. Carmichael reproached himself for not having thought of the possibility of Mr. Chester's possessing such a document, and for not having contrived to get it into his own possession. Mr. Chester probably had it with him when he was at Green Oake. It had been, as it were, laid at his very feet, and he had not stooped to pick it up; it had been tossed by fortune within reach of his hand, and he had let it go unheeded.

Yet how was he to know that his sister would entrust so valuable a paper to a man who evidently knew so little of her private affairs? Still he might know more than he pretended. This Chester was, doubtless, a designing person. He had found his way to Craythorpe as soon as he heard that Doris was an heiress. But if so——

Mr. Carmichael paused.

After all, could Mr. Chester have read the document?

No; the letter he thought bore indirect evidence to his not having done so.

He looked at it again, and read on.

"After the strange revelation that has been lately made, I cannot but see that Lynncourt is now Doris's natural home, and I shall place this before her in the strongest light."

"Of course he will," muttered Mr. Carmichael. "I hate the man."

Why did he hate him? He knew nothing of him, save that he and his mother had befriended Ellen Carmichael when in distress. Perhaps the silent reproach that this carried to him was the secret spring of hatred, though he knew it not. For men cannot bear to have their own self-estimation wounded.

And then he interfered with Mr. Carmichael's designs. Why was a stranger to profit by his efforts to secure to his niece her rightful property?

He almost wished he had left the matter alone altogether. And yet if he had done so, he could not have paid off his old grudge against John Gresford. And now, in paying it off, he should heap benefits on a person whom he equally disliked. And he became more and more irritable and restless.

Aunt Lotty, from her post of observation, wished she had never given him the letters. She was sure they were doing him harm. What would the doctor say?

And Mr. Carmichael tossed uneasily from side to side, arguing the matter in his mind, and wondering whether it would be possible to carry his point without benefiting either the one or the other.

He called to his wife.

She was at the bedside in a moment.

He was not a vacillating man, and yet he looked at her half doubtful whether he should not change his mind. However, he decided to unbend.

“I’ve heard from Mr. Chester.”

Aunt Lotty, burning to know what Mr. Chester had said, prudently restrained herself from asking.

“He will, perhaps, bring Doris back to-day.”

Aunt Lotty uttered an exclamation of joy.

Mr. Carmichael frowned. Then he went on, “Do you suppose that Mr. Chester has any intention of marrying Doris?”

Aunt Lotty felt in a flutter of importance. Mr. Carmichael had asked her opinion upon a serious subject. She was flattered, and flattery we know is calculated to blind the judgment. So poor Aunt Lotty’s judiciousness all vanished; her eyes were closed, and her tongue unloosed. She became voluble.

“Certainly he has. I’ve seen it from the first moment. Though you did not like the idea, I knew it would be so, and I should have said more about it only I was afraid you would not like it. But now that you have mentioned it, I

may say that I feel sure he intends it, and of course Doris likes him, and I don't see that Mr. Lynn need make any objection, for Mr. Chester is so very delightful that Mr. Lynn is sure to like him. And I'm so glad you've taken it into consideration, and I'm sure we cannot feel too grateful to Mr. Chester for finding Doris for us, for it's what no one else could do. And you see she told him where she was at once. Of course he will marry her, and it's sure to turn out well, though marriage is a lottery, and ——”

Here Aunt Lotty's flood of eloquence was suddenly stopped.

“Silence!” said Mr. Carmichael, in a deep, hoarse voice, his face turning almost purple.

Aunt Lotty was in dismay. What had she done? Mr. Carmichael had asked her opinion, and she had given it.

And, like many others whose opinion is asked, she had better not have given it. For, as a general rule, people don't want your opinion, unless it happens to be a confirmation of their own, or unless it is just what they wish it to be; and even then they are apt to think you impertinent for having an opinion at all.

Aunt Lotty, therefore, had committed an egregious blunder and had made Mr. Carmichael more irritable than ever.

“Of course he intends to marry her. Who wanted to be told that?” said he.

Very meekly and in a very tremulous voice Aunt Lotty said she was sorry, that she thought he wanted to know.

But Mr. Carmichael was inconsistent, and replied, "That he did not want to know. Of course Mr. Chester wished for Doris's fortune, but—" here Mr. Carmichael broke off abruptly, then he added, "Call Joyce."

And Joyce came, and Mr. Carmichael began, "I have had a letter from Mr. Chester; he may perhaps be here to-night with Doris. He speaks of the document you mentioned. Did he tell you to whom this document was addressed?"

"To Doris—has he found it?"

"He does not say. You may go now."

And Joyce went.

"They will be here to-night," she murmured to herself, as she closed the door of the little porch-room.

But they did not come that night. Aunt Lotty sent to the station to meet each train, but Doris and Mr. Chester did not arrive.

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CHAPTER X.

FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY.—DORIS'S RETURN.

DORIS and Mr. Chester did not come as was expected, and Mr. Carmichael passed a restless night. Aunt Lotty thinks it was on account of the disappointment, for he was so eager about the trains, and even insisted on the one that arrived at midnight being met.

My own opinion is that there is something on his mind, and I can't help thinking that he's afraid of what may be in the packet. Something about himself, I suppose; for I am convinced that he opened the one that Doris had, and took therefrom his letter to his sister. And he used Doris's seal to seal it up again. That seal was never lost! Oh dear! how suspicious I am growing, and what a bad opinion I have of people. Can I, too, be growing deceitful and insincere, and so judging others by myself? No; I don't think that I am. Mr. Carmichael has deceived me more than once; therefore I am justified in doubting him. I can put a great amount of faith in people before I find them out, but I can't afterwards. Is that unchristian, I wonder? I think not, and I do not feel uncharitable when I say, that I

believe Mr. Carmichael removed that letter from Doris's packet, or, perhaps he did not find it, and fears it is in the one entrusted to Mr. Chester.

N.B. I am writing early in the morning, as it is a miserable day and I cannot go out. The beautiful hoar-frost vanished yesterday, and a thaw set in, and now a drizzling rain, half-sleet, has begun to fall. Well, one can't have unmixed good, either in the weather or in life —

Into each life some rain must fall.

Life would not be life without it; there must be some contrast, some evil, to make the good doubly precious. Rain is as necessary as sunshine to the earth, sorrow as joy to the soul of man. We are always thinking we can settle everything better ourselves than it is settled for us. I wonder if we could, or whether we should not find ourselves something in the case of Phaeton, if we should have an opportunity of trying the experiment.

I keep looking out of the window to see whether the boy is bringing the letter-bag. I can't settle to anything until the letters come. I'm rather glad the post only comes in once a day at Craythorpe.

* * * * *

The letters have arrived. There is one for Mr. Carmichael from Mr. Chester. One from Doris for myself. A very short note. She will be at Green Oake this evening. She wonders if I shall be surprised at all she has to tell me.

No, I shall not. I have looked forward to it for so long that I am quite prepared.

It is the ending of my story. When the wedding is over, and my characters are all disposed of, I shall have to begin a fresh tale, for I don't like a novel carried on after a wedding; it does not seem according to rule. Still there are exceptions.

Mr. Carmichael is decidedly better since he received his letter; the doctor says he may get up for a little towards evening, so he will be able to receive Mr. Chester. I wonder what Mr. Lynn will think of Doris's engagement? How pleased Aunt Lotty will be! And Mr. Carmichael? *He* won't like it; however, he is but a secondary person now. There is Aunt Lotty calling to me. How unsettled I feel this morning; I can do nothing but jot down unconnected sentences in my diary. What can Aunt Lotty want?

* * * * *

It was not Aunt Lotty that wanted me, but Mr. Carmichael.

"What had Doris said to me?"

"Nothing especial. Merely that she would be at home this evening."

"Oh—" a pause; "does she say anything about the lost document?"

"No."

"You can read Mr. Chester's letter, Joyce."

This was an unwonted condescension on Mr. Carmichael's part, and I wondered what undercurrent had brought it about, for I knew there must be some reason for it. So I took Mr. Chester's note.

He had prevailed upon Doris to return. He had had some difficulty at first, but had represented to her strongly that it was the right thing to do, and would be in accordance with her mother's wishes. Therefore she had consented, and he would bring her to Green Oake to-day. He must start again for Rome almost immediately, and wished to have an interview with Mr. Lynn, so he should stay at Craythorpe until the end of the week.

"I wonder," I said, "that he says nothing of the document; he seemed to think it would be of great importance in impressing Doris with the necessity of returning."

Mr. Carmichael looked at me keenly. Why was he so anxious about this paper? I looked at the letter again.

"Do you think," asked Mr. Carmichael, "that though he makes no mention of this paper, that it has been the means of inducing Doris to return to us?"

Why did he ask my opinion? What was my opinion worth in comparison with that of a man of Mr. Carmichael's acuteness? It must be his illness that had rendered him so nervous and willing to lean upon a weaker judgment. I hesitated what to reply. How could I say "Yes" or "No," though "No" was my own conviction? And Mr. Carmichael still awaited my answer. Suddenly I remembered Doris's let-

ter; there was a message in it for her uncle. I drew it from my pocket and glanced over it. There was nothing that would give any clue in this message, but I felt that had there been any additional cause for disliking Mr. Carmichael, Doris would never have written it. Therefore I replied at once,

“No, I think the document is not found.”

Mr. Carmichael's countenance, which was already less clouded than it had been, grew positively sunshiny.

“You are a sensible girl, Joyce. I think the document is lost.”

Not that it much mattered now what there was in it to Mr. Carmichael's disadvantage, since Doris would not be much longer under his roof. And I wondered if Mr. Carmichael had arrived at another conclusion from his letter. I suppose not, though I could have gathered it from Mr. Chester's letter as easily as I did from Doris's. But then women *do* draw conclusions much more readily and with less evidence than men, as I had even now an opportunity of testifying. And what is more, their perceptions are generally correct, even though the evidence seems against them. They have a sublime illogical way of dispersing surroundings and ambiguities, and walking straight through a mass of plausible arguments and statements, and arriving by a short cut at the truth. I think Mr. Carmichael had wisdom enough to allow this qualification to women in general, though I think he considered Aunt Lotty as an exception to the rule. At any rate he seemed quite to rely

on my decision, and was altogether in a very good humour. Aunt Lotty was delighted with the improvement in his health and spirits.

“You see, dear, good news is the best medicine after all, and his mind’s at rest about Doris now. He has been terribly harassed about her, and no wonder. I shall be more than half inclined to scold her when she comes for causing us all so much anxiety.”

But, of course, when Doris did come, all Aunt Lotty’s anger vanished, and the prodigal was not welcomed with greater rejoicings than was Doris at Green Oake. Mr. Carmichael was a little constrained in his manner both to Doris and Mr. Chester, but it wore off after he had contrived to edge in the question that was still to a certain extent undecided.

“Did you find the document useful in backing up your arguments?” asked Mr. Carmichael, with apparent carelessness.

But I, being an interested observer, noted the eager look in his eye, and the anxiety with which he awaited Mr. Chester’s reply. And I knew that he was determined to know the worst at once, whatever that might be.

“I am sorry to say,” returned Mr. Chester, “that the document must have been lost on my journey. If I had not induced Doris to come back to Craythorpe without it I should never have forgiven myself for being so careless. But, great as is the loss in one point of view, I presume that Mr.

Lynn's packet contains the same information. At least, Mrs. Carmichael told me that she was preparing a similar document to place in Doris's own hands."

Mr. Carmichael, in a less constrained tone, answered:—

Doubtless, and it will be a great comfort to Doris to read her mother's sorrowful story."

For, of course, Doris knew no particulars, she at present was merely acquainted with the fact that, after a separation of more than eighteen years, she was restored to her father through her mother's death.

From time to time I looked at Mr. Chester to see whether he still felt any annoyance at my foolishness when he was at Green Oake the other day. He looked very grave, and when I spoke to him he did not answer as he used to do. There was something very cold and constrained in his manner—no wonder. There was a ring at the hall-door.

"It will be Mr. Lynn," said Aunt Lotty.

It was Mr. Lynn, but he did not come into the drawing-room.

Doris sprang up and seized Mr. Chester by the arm; she was trembling very much.

"My mother's husband! Oh, Gabriel!"

"Your father, Doris."

"It is so strange," she said; "I cannot believe it."

Mr. Lynn had gone into Mr. Carmichael's study; he wished to see Doris alone. And Doris went to him.

* * * * *

When Doris came to the little porch-room, I saw that she had been crying. She sat down by me, and putting her arms round me, leaned her head upon my shoulder, but it was some time before she spoke. Then she said:—

“My poor, poor mother!”

She could not get that thought out of her head.

“And your father, Doris?”

“Yes, he is to be pitied, too; he has suffered much. But men cannot suffer as women do; they have more to think of, more to take an interest in; they go out into the world, and it is so large a field that they can lose themselves in it, and forget partially, if not wholly, their troubles; but a woman stays quietly at home, within a narrow circle, and cannot so easily withdraw herself from herself. She has to go on patiently bearing her sorrow, until it wears itself out or wears her out. She can do nothing but wait quietly until the end comes. Oh, Joyce, how my mother must have grieved, and I have never comforted her!”

“But you could not, Doris; you did not know her trouble.”

“Why did she not tell me? I could, perhaps, have helped her to bear it.”

“No, Doris,” said I, soothingly, “there are some griefs that each must bear alone. And this was one. Your mother was wiser than you.”

“Mr. Lynn—I cannot quite call him father yet, it seems all like a dream—has been asking me so much about her, making me tell him every particular of her life and of her

death. He thinks of her just as if he had but parted with her yesterday, although it is almost nineteen years since they said good-bye to one another. He told me all about that parting, Joyce."

"But how was it that he was so long away? How was it that he was supposed to be murdered?"

"He was left for murdered on the shore, but there happened to be a vessel anchoring in the bay from which a boat had been put off to get water. The sailors found Mr. Lynn lying on the beach, still alive, but insensible, so they took him off to the ship. It was some days before he recovered his consciousness entirely, and then he found himself in a sailing-vessel far away at sea. After many misadventures he at length reached England, where he took the first ship bound for Australia. But he was too late. In the meantime my mother had sailed in the Albatross!"

And Doris, shuddering crept closer to me.

"Joyce, I wonder why these things are permitted. What had my mother done that such a life of suffering should be hers? They say that our lots on earth are tolerably equal, if one thing is balanced against another. I don't believe it; our lots are not equal."

I did not exactly know how to reply; it was scarcely the time to enter into an argument upon the subject; besides I was not quite sure which side I should take myself. Therefore, I only said:—

"It is all over now, Doris, she is at peace; her troubles

are ended, and the question that you have asked is answered to her. In the end we shall doubtless know the meaning and the purpose of much that seems mysterious now."

And then we spoke of Mr. Lynn again.

"He is so kind, so thoughtful, Joyce," said Doris; "but I am not going to Lynncourt just yet. I shall go every day and get accustomed to it first; it would be such a sudden change for poor Doris Gresford—I'm glad my name isn't really Carmichael," she put in parenthetically; "such a sudden change—to become all at once mistress of a grand house like Lynncourt. I shall stay with you a little longer, Joyce, till it is all made known that I am Mr. Lynn's daughter."

"And then you will go to Lynncourt and stay until——"

"Until what?" asked Doris, looking up at me.

I looked down at her.

"Tell me," I said.

"Until I marry Gabriel," answered Doris, calmly. "Are you surprised, Joyce?"

"Not in the least; I have always expected it."

"I have not," returned Doris; "I had not the slightest idea that Gabriel cared for me."

"Nor that you cared for him?" I asked, in a half jesting tone, for I was almost afraid of betraying myself.

"No," replied Doris, very seriously, "and I'm not quite sure that I do now."

CHAPTER XI.

JOYCE WISHES TO EXPLAIN.

WHEN men accomplish an object that they have zealously and perseveringly worked for, it often happens that the satisfaction they anticipated is by no means realised when the result is gained.

This depends on several causes; either they find that the object has not been worth the pains bestowed upon it, or they are too worn out with all their watching and waiting thoroughly to enjoy the fruit of their labours, or it may be that the object does not comprehend in its final results all the advantages that at first sight appeared to belong to it.

Mr. Carmichael had accomplished his object, but he experienced little or no satisfaction. The gleam of triumph that had brightened his countenance during its prosecution had faded away and had given place to a restless, anxious look. His eye nervously glanced round, as though he thought that everyone was observing him. But fears on that point were wholly superfluous; each one was too much engrossed with his or her own thoughts to bestow much attention upon what might be passing in another's mind.

Mr. Carmichael's niece was an heiress. Lynncourt would

come into her possession, and John Gresford's son would lose his inheritance. It would even pass out of John Gresford's own hands, through his, Mr. Carmichael's niece. Yes, this was all accomplished. Everything had gone smoothly, though once or twice he certainly had been in danger of failing in his plans. And Mr. Carmichael tried to put the thought of his danger far from him. It was over now, and he rubbed his hands feebly, very feebly, for he was still weak; the attack had left him by no means himself, and he started at every sound. There was a vague, uncomfortable sensation in his mind, too, that he could not shake off. Pshaw! he should feel differently when this illness had passed off. If he could get out into the fresh air this restlessness would vanish. Why did people look at him as though they wished to question him? He was not bound to answer. What a coward he was! Of what was he afraid? The proofs were all clear. There was no doubt upon the subject. Mr. Gresford Lynn had owned his daughter,—and his son was disinherited. Mr. Carmichael had accomplished what he sought. He had had his revenge. And what was it worth? Had he benefited himself? No. Had he annoyed Mr. Lynn? No.

Mr. Lynn cared nothing for the property. Mr. Lynn's feeling was one of absorbing thankfulness at having found his daughter: the child of his beloved wife, the solace of her years of supposed widowhood, the consolation of her last anguish-stricken days. The loss of the property was gain

to him since he had found his child. He scarce could express his gratitude to Mr. Carmichael, and the old barrier that had existed between the two men for more than twenty years was broken down. They were brothers-in-law. They had an interest in common. Mr. Lynn had forgotten and forgiven; yes, more than forgiven, he had blessed his enemy. And Mr. Carmichael? No, he had not forgotten, he seemed to have only brought the past nearer to him; it clung to him and would not leave him. And for forgiveness, what had he to forgive? He almost wished that he had kept his sister's secret. He was by no means sure that he was glad of his success. He had benefited Mr. Lynn. He had benefited Mr. Chester. He had *not* benefited himself.

Mr. Chester was going to marry Doris. Aunt Lotty's prognostications had proved correct. Mr. Lynn was pleased with him, and he had been a friend to his wife. And Mr. Chester was staying at Lynncourt, for Mr. Lynn was eager to obtain as much information as possible concerning his wife's earlier days in the South. Aunt Lotty was in extreme delight, and Joyce was as usual the recipient of her confidences.

"You see, dear," said she, "how wonderfully things turn out for the best. I felt sure that Mr. Lynn would like Mr. Chester if he could only see him; it's just what I always said. Ah! if my poor sister-in-law were alive, how happy she would be! I wonder if people in heaven know what's going on upon the earth."

“I don’t know,” replied Joyce, absently.

“Dear me! no, of course, how should one know?” responded Aunt Lotty, hastily. “I hope it was not an irreverent thought, but one can’t help speculating a little sometimes, and wondering if people do know what’s going on,—angels I mean, not people, of course; for they’re not people, but something else. I don’t know if they’re even angels,” and Aunt Lotty stopped in bewilderment. “But whatever they are,” she went on, “one can’t help thinking of these things. I remember thinking, when the old rector died, what a comfort it would be to him if he could only see his funeral. All the people in the village attended, and there was not a house but had the shutters closed. But still, perhaps, people mightn’t care for these things after death.”

And again Joyce replied, “I don’t know.”

“But why should I be talking of deaths and funerals with this wedding in my head, I can’t imagine. They say to dream of a funeral is a sure sign of a wedding, and I suppose I am half dreaming now, or else I shouldn’t be thinking of such strange things.” And Aunt Lotty opened her eyes wide, as if to assure herself of the fact that she was really awake. “If any one could write a story,” she continued, “what a story this would make! And the wedding would be such a nice ending. Of course, they’ll walk to the church, it’s so near the house. And the brides-maids,—but, Joyce dear, I wonder who the others will be;” and,

overcome by the difficulty, Aunt Lotty paused abruptly. And Joyce could not help her out of it.

"There's Mr. Carmichael's bell," resumed Aunt Lotty, "I must go. Joyce dear, I'm not quite easy about Mr. Carmichael, he's by no means himself again. All this worry and excitement has been too much for him. I've felt it myself, and what must he have done, as his sister's nearer to him than she is to me? And Doris is his own niece. Not but what he's partial to you, Joyce, and thinks a good deal of your sense, and I'm thankful he does, as you're my niece. It makes things pleasant, and you're a good girl, Joyce, and a great comfort."

And Aunt Lotty went away.

Joyce sat down before a large embroidery frame and tried to work; but after taking one or two stitches, she rose and walked up and down the room; then, stopping at the window, she looked out over the garden from which the snow had half-melted, so that the lawn looked like white and green patchwork. The garden gate swung on its hinges, and Mr. Chester and Doris appeared. And Joyce retreated to the embroidery frame, and was bending over it when Mr. Chester entered the room. She had not seen him alone since the day that he called on his way to Linton.

He went to the fire-place, and stood leaning against it; but he seemed to have no inclination to enter into conversation. Joyce broke the silence by asking:

"Have you been a long walk, Mr. Chester?"

“I have been looking at Doris’s favourite view, now that it is white with snow,” he returned.

“It must look very different from the sketch you took.”

“Very, and I have been looking at it with very different feelings from those that then possessed me, Miss Dormer. It is strange how a few months will work quite a revolution in one’s life and actions. How much has passed since then that none of us could expect; or, at least, none excepting Mr. Carmichael. He knew of all this at that time, though why the revelation was not made sooner, I cannot imagine.”

“Perhaps Mr. Carmichael had not all his proofs then.”

“Mr. Carmichael is impenetrable,” returned Mr. Chester. “I own he baffles me.”

“Yes?” rejoined Joyce, interrogatively.

“Miss Dormer,” said Mr. Chester, gravely, after a short pause, “I asked you a question once, and I am going to ask it again now.”

Joyce looked up. “Well?” she said.

“Do you distrust Mr. Carmichael still?”

Joyce hesitated.

“Remember your opinion is as safe with me now as it was then. Have late events inspired you with more confidence?”

“They have not,” replied Joyce. “I am sorry to say that I distrust him still. I have perhaps no right to say this, but I cannot help feeling that there is something kept back,

something that he fears. I dare scarcely even shape my floating ideas into sober thoughts, much less into words. I hardly know what I think, but I regret deeply that Doris's packet is lost."

"You cannot regret it so much as I do, Miss Dormer. There is, however, one faint hope of its recovery, but so faint that I don't look forward to it. And now that Doris is quite reconciled to going to Lynncourt, it is not perhaps of so much importance; still I hope it may be found."

"Mr. Carmichael does *not*."

"Miss Dormer!"

"Mr. Carmichael is greatly relieved by the loss of that packet," continued Joyce. "Perhaps I ought not to mention this, but you are now so intimately concerned in everything affecting Doris, that I do not feel as if I could let you go without telling you of my suspicion, and I am going to ask you something. If this packet should be found, and if, as I believe, it contains anything to Mr. Carmichael's discredit, will you, for my aunt's sake, use your influence that he may be leniently dealt with?"

Mr. Chester had quitted the fire-place, and seated himself by the embroidery frame. As Joyce spoke he drew nearer, and looked at her earnestly and wonderingly.

"What do you suspect, Miss Dormer?"

"That, I dare not hint beyond what I have said," returned Joyce. "But will you promise what I have asked for my

aunt's sake? What would become of poor Aunt Lotty if her belief in Mr. Carmichael were shaken?"

"I do promise you, Miss Dormer. If the packet should be found, Doris will be the first to read it, and I think I may say that you will be the second, and whatever you feel right to advise Doris with regard to its contents I shall take as my guide in the matter."

Then he did not quite despise her after her foolish outbreak. She felt almost grateful to him; as though she wished to thank him for not judging her harshly. However, her wishes did not shape themselves into words; indeed she might have found it difficult to express her feelings so that he would have understood her, therefore she wisely left the subject alone.

"If you find the packet, will you send it to Lynncourt and not to Green Oake?" she said.

And again Mr. Chester gazed at her inquisitively.

"Certainly; but, Miss Dormer—"

"No," she said, interrupting him, "you must trust me implicitly. Believe, that on Doris's account I will, as I once promised before, act to the best of my ability and my conscience. Will you not trust me?"

And she returned his steady gaze.

"I will," he replied; "but I shall nevertheless ask you one more question, and I give you my word that your answer shall be safe with me. Do you think that Mr. Carmichael removed any paper or papers from Mr. Lynn's packet?"

Joyce did think so, but the question had never been so startlingly brought before her, never made so real, so tangible. She was almost afraid of hearing herself acknowledge it. But Mr. Chester had no intention of being left without an answer.

"Mr. Carmichael is a bold man," said he, "and a skilful one."

"He was," answered Joyce, "but he is altered by this illness; he is by no means the same man."

"No, he is a good deal shaken. My opinion is that he's just the sort of person to go all at once, and I should greatly fear any return of this seizure."

"Poor Aunt Lotty," said Joyce musingly.

Mr. Chester shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you imagine your aunt's life to be a particularly happy one?" he asked.

"I think she has a belief in it," returned Joyce.

"Rather a left-handed way of answering a question," said he.

"I think, then, that Aunt Lotty does consider it a happy one. She regards Mr. Carmichael as a demigod, and I should be sorry to see him dismounted from the pedestal on which she has placed him. I believe, if anything should happen, that is, if he should die, Aunt Lotty would sincerely mourn for him as an irreparable loss."

"I don't doubt it, Miss Dormer; and, as far as I am concerned, her faith in him shall never be shaken; so you may

safely answer my question, especially as I know perfectly what your reply will be."

"What use, then, will there be in my answering it?"

"A form of speech for my own satisfaction," returned Mr. Chester. "I wish to hear in so many words that there is at least one point upon which Miss Dormer and I agree."

And Joyce replied, "I do think that Mr. Carmichael abstracted from that packet some paper or papers prejudicial to himself."

"When?"

"Soon after Doris's arrival at Green Oake."

"And this was why you refused to take charge of the packet for me?"

"Yes; but, Mr. Chester, you must ask me no more questions. It is my turn to ask some now."

"I shall be happy to answer them."

Mr. Chester spoke listlessly, and leaned back in his chair, with his eyes half-closed. He did not seem to be thinking of what he was saying, but rather to be indulging in a reverie, that had nothing whatever to do with the present.

Joyce perceived this at once, and her courage almost failed her. Mr. Chester evidently took little interest in anything she might have to say. Still she had felt so vexed, so uncomfortable, during the last few days, that she felt she must make an effort, whatever it might cost her, to clear herself from the wrong impression that Mr. Chester must have

formed of her. And yet why need she care what he thought of her? Was it of any importance? But she did so wish to be judged rightly.

Judged rightly! Who does not wish to be judged rightly? And who does not signally fail in endeavouring to be so? Few will take a man's evidence of himself, they prefer their own preconceived opinion. Therefore, as a general rule, explanations go for nothing or worse than nothing; one must sit down quietly and patiently bear blame for motives wrongly imputed. True, it is hard to suffer, and perhaps one does not derive a superabundance of consolation from the fact that there are hundreds and thousands suffering in like manner. Still, it is a sort of profit and loss arrangement in moral economics, that must suffice to satisfy us.

But Joyce felt it unsatisfying, so she went blunderingly into what she hoped might turn out a satisfactory explanation of the hair-burning a few nights since.

"I am afraid you think me hasty and passionate, Mr. Chester."

"That is an affirmation, not a question," he replied.

"Then, do you think me passionate?"

"Why do you wish to know?" returned Mr. Chester, raising himself a little, and looking full at Joyce.

"That is no answer, but a question also," she said. "I must ask again, do you think me passionate?"

"Not very," he answered, quietly.

"I thought so," said Joyce, a little sadly: "but I'm not

passionate in one way, Mr. Chester. I don't feel angry. I didn't feel angry the other night."

"When?" asked Mr. Chester.

Joyce thought he might have understood when.

"The night you were here on your way to Linton."

"At what particular period, Miss Dormer?"

And again Joyce felt that he might have known without asking.

"After you had untwisted Doris's talisman," said Joyce, still hesitating to come to the point.

"Oh! when you threw the hair into the fire."

"Yes."

"Why did you throw it into the fire, if you did not feel angry?" inquired Mr. Chester.

This was what Joyce's explanation brought her to. She could not tell him why, though she knew it well enough. So she parried the attack.

"The questioning is to be on my side, Mr. Chester."

"But how can I answer your questions without obtaining some information on the point?"

"Did you think me angry?"

"Well, Miss Dormer, I must candidly confess that I did."

"I was not."

"How am I to believe it?"

"I don't know," returned Joyce; "there is only my word to rely upon."

"I think, perhaps, I may take your word; that is, if you can assure me that you are perfectly truthful."

"I can; I am," said Joyce, eagerly, her face brightening; then she stopped; a sorrowful shade passed into her eyes; "at least," she added, slowly, "I try to be, but no one is perfect."

"What an old axiom our questioning has come to. We are none of us perfect! I did not know you set up for perfection, Miss Dormer."

"I think I shall leave off asking questions, or trying to explain anything," said Joyce.

"It is the wisest course you can pursue," replied Mr. Chester, as he leaned back again, and gazed at Joyce through his half-closed eyelids.

Joyce, bending over the embroidery frame, looked up for a moment, and her eyes met not only Mr. Chester's but another pair that looked down from behind Mr. Chester's chair. Doris, unperceived by both, had stolen softly into the room.

"Gabriel," said she, "when will you and Joyce leave off quarrelling? It seems to me that the more I wish you to like one another the more perverse you grow upon the point."

"We were not quarrelling," responded Mr. Chester, "we were coming to explanations."

"Worse and worse; every one knows the result of explanations."

"But Miss Dormer's explanation has had no result."

"Of course not. Have you lost the talisman, Gabriel?" asked Doris, suddenly.

Mr. Chester made no reply, and Joyce began working diligently. Doris looked from one to the other.

"Oh dear," said Doris, "I shall have to give up being superstitious and having faith in charms."

"You see," replied Mr. Chester, "that we are not living in the days of witchcraft."

And Joyce was glad that nothing more was said upon the subject.

CHAPTER XII.

DORIS BEGINS A STORY.

DORIS was very silent during the evening; she curled herself up in a corner of the sofa, seemingly absorbed in a reverie that was not altogether unpleasing, if one might judge from the half-smile that now and then stole over her face.

"Of what are you thinking, Doris?" asked Mr. Chester.

"I am copying Joyce, and making up a little story of my own," returned she. "You can't think how very interesting it is. And I'm a great deal farther advanced than Joyce, for I know the end of it, and I've fixed upon the title. Odin's birds have been with me for the last half-hour—one upon each shoulder."

Aunt Lotty looked up.

"Birds, my dear; I do not understand."

"Only Odin's birds, Aunt Lotty, they're invisible. You know how people say to children, 'a little bird has been telling me so and so.'"

"And very wrong indeed it is of people," responded Aunt Lotty. "If there's one thing more than another

that I object to, it is people telling children anything that is not true — children get to know it fast enough.”

“But I think,” said Joyce, “that children understand it as a sort of poetic licence, and when they comprehend that it is not literally true they appreciate its figurativeness. Perhaps,” she continued, turning to Mr. Chester, “the nursery saying is a corruption of Hugo and Mumin, and so we have the old Northern superstition lingering among us without our being aware of it. It is curious to think how tradition and legendary lore keep an unconscious hold upon us, and how we are, as it were, but polished chips from the rough, unhewn blocks of granite of the grand old times.”

“Very theoretic,” answered Mr. Chester,” and somewhat vague.”

“Oh, Joyce always gets a little vague when she soars into the sublime,” said Doris. “Who else would have thought of connecting Hugo with the modern birds of nursery celebrity? Really, Joyce, there is something quite poetic about it.”

“Ah!” said Aunt Lotty, “I used to like poetry when I was young, but I don’t care much about it now; I think, with the exception of ‘Lucy——’”

Here Mr. Carmichael suddenly roused himself to observe that he objected to “Lucy Gray,” and was tired of hearing of her. Which was doubtless the case, as he was in the

habit of hearing her referred to so constantly; and Mr. Carmichael's illness having made him irritable, he enunciated the sentiment less courteously than he might otherwise have done.

Aunt Lotty was rebuked, and took to her knitting with great diligence. Joyce felt half inclined to laugh; whilst Doris went round to Aunt Lotty's side, and kissing her gently, so that Mr. Carmichael, who had relapsed into his doze, might not hear, whispered:

"I like 'Lucy Gray,' Aunt Lotty: Mrs. Howell used to repeat it to me when I was a little child."

Aunt Lotty felt uncomfortable under the consolation administered, for was it not, to a certain extent, a covert act of rebellion against Mr. Carmichael? therefore she patted Doris's head, and bade her go and sit down again. So Doris returned to her sofa corner, and again fell into a reverie.

Mr. Chester did not seem inclined to talk; perhaps he had taken his cue from Doris. At least so Joyce thought, and she determined not to interfere with it; therefore she pretended to be deeply absorbed in the mysteries of the embroidery frame, though she could not have told whether the thread in her needle were blue or scarlet. They were a silent party, and the longer the silence continued, the more difficult it seemed to break it.

Joyce, despite her determination, felt that it was becoming painful, and would have given anything to be able to frame

one simple unconstrained remark; but it was hopeless, her lips were sealed. Nevertheless, she sat torturing her brain for some topic that might be acceptable to all, and, as is generally the case, the more she sought, the more unavailing was the search, and the more inappropriate the subjects that did present themselves.

Was Mr. Chester similarly occupied? She could not tell; but she glanced at him from time to time as he continued to gaze steadily into the fire. Once he looked up as she looked towards him, and their eyes met. And somehow a strange feeling stole over her, as if she were guilty of a species of treachery to Doris. She could not analyse it, but it rendered her more hopelessly incapable of making a speech than ever. She cast a furtive glance at Doris, but Doris was leaning back amongst the cushions with half-shut eyes, and a quiet smile upon her lips. Yes, she was perfectly happy!

Mr. Carmichael opened his eyes.

“Why does no one talk?” he asked; “I am well enough now, it does not disturb me.”

He spoke in a half-querulous, half-angry tone. He did not like being looked upon as an invalid. His illness was not an agreeable idea to him, he wished to get rid of it, to shake it off.

“I think,” answered Joyce, finding her voice with a great effort, “that no one has anything to say.”

“That is just what I have been thinking for some time,”

said Aunt Lotty, meekly, "and it's very surprising, for one ought to have a great many questions to ask. I'm sure enough has happened during the last few weeks. I wonder it did not strike me to ask Doris about the person she staid with at Linton."

Mr. Carmichael took no notice of his wife's speech, but turned to Mr. Chester.

"When do you start for the Continent?"

"Very shortly; I am going into Devonshire first with Mr. Lynn. He is anxious to visit the places where——" Mr. Chester hesitated and looked at Doris, but Doris finished the sentence for him.

"Where my mother lived for so many years, and," she added, in a lower tone, "where she died. He wishes to be alone there for a time. Is not that it, Gabriel?"

"Yes, I shall leave him there, and get off to Rome again as soon as possible."

"And when do you return?"

"I cannot tell. I am painting a picture that I wish to finish on the spot, if possible."

"Oh," and Mr. Carmichael moved restlessly, and then rising from his chair he went towards the fireplace; he took the poker and tried to stir the fire, but his hand trembled a good deal.

"Allow me," said Mr. Chester, and Mr. Carmichael, exhausted, reseated himself.

"I'm weaker than I thought for," he muttered.

Aunt Lotty looked at him anxiously.

“You don’t feel worse to-night?” she said.

Joyce also looking at him was startled to perceive the change that had taken place during the last few days. She had been so much absorbed in other matters, that after the first alarm of Mr. Carmichael’s illness she had not watched him very observantly, but now as her eyes followed Aunt Lotty’s anxious gaze she noticed how much older-looking he had become, and that the lips usually so firmly compressed had a nervous unrest about them, and his eyes were heavy and wandering.

“I am no worse,” said Mr. Carmichael, steadying his voice; “I’m better—a great deal better. I don’t know what you are thinking of! Is it the way to make a man better to depress his spirits by telling him he’s worse? Mr. Chester,” said he, turning from Aunt Lotty, “I was going to ask, Is there —— have you —— have you any hope of finding the letter that you lost?”

Mr. Carmichael grasped the arm of his chair, and spoke with some effort.

“Not much, I fear.”

“Still there is a chance?”

“A very slight one. I think it must have been lost on my journey.”

Mr. Carmichael sighed.

“You will, of course, send it at once if it should turn up?” said he.

“Yes.”

Mr. Carmichael made another great effort to speak very steadily and calmly.

“I shall be glad to see the contents of that packet, they may be valuable; though, of course, in the record left by my sister all necessary information is contained. Therefore, in one point of view, we do not suffer much from its loss.”

“Certainly not; I see no need of any further evidence. The letter would of course be valuable to Doris as a remembrancer of her mother, and valuable only to her.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Carmichael, musingly; “yes, Doris would like to have the letter, but it is doubtless lost; we must think no more about it.”

And he fervently hoped and trusted that it had found its way to that mighty receptacle from whence lost articles never return.

Joyce was watching Mr. Chester attentively during the conversation, and she saw that he, too, was struck with Mr. Carmichael’s eagerness about the lost packet. Once their eyes met, and she knew that he fully shared in her suspicious feelings.

Doris, too, has paused in her reverie, and was narrowly observing Mr. Carmichael. And even guileless Aunt Lotty said in an aside to Joyce,—

“I wish, dear, that that letter was either quite lost or found. Mr. Carmichael will never be himself again until it’s settled. Though why he should be so anxious, I can’t

imagine; he's done everything he could, and has had a great deal of trouble, poor man."

And Aunt Lotty looked at her husband, and Joyce could see a little frightened look come into her face, for Aunt Lotty felt a presentiment of evil—a presentiment that she could not have defined, and that pointed to nothing definite, but which caused the frightened look to come into her face, and a shiver to run through her heart, when she looked at Mr. Carmichael.

But the Dormers were not a superstitious family: they were far too matter-of-fact to believe in supernatural warnings; so Aunt Lotty attributed the shiver to a draught from the door, and drawing her shawl closer round her, believed that a sharp frost was setting in.

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY. INQUISITORIAL.

I WAS going across the hall into the little morning-room, thinking I would leave the drawing-room for Doris and Mr. Chester, as they would have so much to talk about and to arrange before he went away.

"Doris is going to marry Mr. Chester," said I to myself, as my hand was on the handle of the door.

I had said it over and over many times during the last few days, as if I wished to familiarise myself with the fact, though of course I had known all along how it would be, and had always looked forward to it as the ending of my story.

Yet now that it had come to pass it somehow seemed stranger to me than I had anticipated, and it did not work quite so smoothly as I expected. Something jarred, though I could not tell what it was.

It appeared to me that Doris was very unconcerned, and Mr. Chester also; they might have been engaged for years. Yet this was perhaps natural, since they must have had it in constant anticipation. And still repeating the words, I

opened the door* of the morning-room. There was no one there, for Aunt Lotty was sitting up-stairs with Mr. Carmichael, who was not quite so well to-day.

I was glad to be alone—I could do a little quiet reading; and I took up a book¹ and drew a chair close to the fire. I turned over the pages, but found that I could not fix my attention; my thoughts strayed far enough away, and my eyes wandered to the bright fire that was leaping and flashing in the grate, and I began to trace pictures in the embers, and the flames sparkled up and flickered and nodded at me, until it seemed as though I were holding a conversation with them.

What a companion a fire is! A living, moving, restless element. If I had been a heathen, I think I should have been a fire worshipper. Yes, what a companion, as it burns so cheerily in the long winter evenings, when one closes the shutters and draws the curtains and shuts out the cold dark night and the howling tempest; whilst the wind goes whistling round the house, and the storm-blast answers it, and a chorus of wild spirit-voices shriek to one another, and one listens and listens to the weird-like strife. Often and often have I half fancied that they were lost spirits wailing frantically in their mad despair. Lost! lost! lost! The deep hoarse groan answering the shrill piercing cry or the plaintive, moaning sobs, whilst now and then is heard a shriek like to a burst of unearthly mocking laughter, as if the arch-fiend were triumphing amidst his fallen angels.

Many and many a night have I listened, until I believed that I heard the voices speaking to another, only my earthly ears were not sensitive enough to catch their words.

Thus I went on dreaming as I looked into the fire, and then leaning back I drove these thoughts away, and other thoughts came in their place, and prompted me to take inquisitorial proceedings with myself, and to examine into my inmost heart. And the first question I asked was this:

“Self, art thou glad or sorry that this engagement has come to pass?” And I was going to answer “Glad,” but that just then conscience gave so sharp a prick that it startled me, and for a moment I could not speak, and whilst I was thus waiting, conscience followed up its advantage and whispered: “The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!” And I could make no reply, for, in spite of my brave assertions, I still felt the dull gnawing pain, and I knew I could not be quite glad, however much I might wish to be so, until that was gone. So I fenced the question: “I do not envy Doris’s happiness; I am glad that she is happy.”

“But how about thyself? Is there no wish in thine heart that it might have been otherwise?”

“None. Oh, what am I saying! Let me at least be truthful to myself. The world cannot hear—what matters it. Ah well, I will confess myself no longer.”

And then I thought of good George Herbert’s advice,—

“Sum up at night what thou hast done by day
And in the morning what thou hast to do.

Dress and undress thy soul. Mark the decay,
And growth, of it. If, with thy watch, *that* too
Be down, then wind up both. Since we shall be
Most surely judged, make thy accounts agree."

Ah! what a pity men do not follow it!—for truly, if we made a daily examination of our hearts, and so kept better accounts with ourselves, there would not be so heavy a balance against us when we come to add up the final sum.

Therefore I went to work honestly once more, and confessed to myself that I could not quite get rid of the pain, but that still I was glad that Doris and Mr. Chester were happy, and that whatever might be the opportunity, nothing could induce me to lift a finger to mar their happiness. But I was not quite happy myself. This was mortifying, for in my story I had been indulging in an imaginative picture of the transcendental frame of mind in which I should find myself when the consummation was achieved and my hero and heroine were happily united.

But I fell short of this beatific transcendentalism when I came face to face with the reality, and I discovered that I, Joyce Dormer, was but a poor earth-worm after all, that writhed and twisted like other earth-worms when trodden upon.

Then I consoled myself. So it is with all. However mighty are our aspirations,—however exalted our frame in occasional rapt moments, there is a stern reality in life and its belongings that crushes down this loftiness of spirit, and in

humility alone are we permitted to rise. As I reached this point the door opened, and Mr. Chester and Doris appeared.

"I have been wondering where you were hiding," said Doris, as I bent over the book. She placed her hand upon it to take it away, and as she did so she laughed.

"All a pretence, Joyce, this being so studiously inclined; for see, the book is upside down!"

And so it was, and I had never known it; and I felt the blood rushing into my face, and I could not look up at first, and when I did I met Mr. Chester's eyes fixed upon me; and again the odd uncomfortable feeling of treachery to Doris came over me.

"Gabriel is going away this afternoon," said she.

"So soon?" I answered in surprise, for I thought he would have stayed at Craythorpe for a few days longer. I did not think that the "very soon" would be accomplished so literally.

"The sooner I depart, the sooner I can return," said Mr. Chester.

"And you will be anxious to do so now on Doris's account."

And Doris having vanished, I decided that this was a good time for offering the congratulations to Mr. Chester, which hitherto I had had no opportunity of doing; so I continued,—

"I am glad to be able to offer my best wishes for your happiness, Mr. Chester."

"Thank you," returned Mr. Chester, shortly.

"Doris is very amiable," said I, "every one must love her.

I will take good care of her whilst you are away; though that is scarcely needful now that her father is restored to her."

"I don't know, Miss Dormer; she seems to cling more to you than to any one."

"That is strange!" said I.

"No, it is not," he answered, somewhat abruptly.

I was a little surprised, and perhaps I showed it, for Mr. Chester said more gently,—

"You forget your resemblance to her mother. Mr. Lynn also was struck with it."

„Yes, I had forgotten that."

"Miss Dormer," said Mr. Chester, hesitatingly, "I should like to feel before I go away that there is no unfriendliness between us."

"There is none," I answered, warmly; "I shall ever look upon you and Doris as my nearest and best-cared-for friends. If there had been any doubt, it would have been on my side; I must have seemed so strange, so unreasonable sometimes."

"No you did not," he replied; "I was to blame for any annoyance you may have shown or expressed, and I regret it. Will you forget it, and remember me in a friendly spirit when I am gone?"

"Of course I will," I answered eagerly; "doubly so now on Doris's account."

“Then it is only to Doris that I am to owe your friendship?”

“No, Mr. Chester,” I said, “not *only* to Doris; and I looked steadily at him. What he was going to say I never heard, for Doris’s return prevented it, but he gave one of his pleasant smiles and held out his hand.

“That is right,” said Doris; “I hope you have come to an amicable arrangement at last. Really, Gabriel, if you were to continue on quarrelling terms with Joyce, I think I should have to give up our engagement. Would it break your heart if I did?” she added, laying her hand on his arm, and glancing up laughingly into his face.

“What nonsense you talk, Doris,” he answered; “is not a broken heart a delusion—an impossibility—a mere figurative expression?”

“Not altogether,” said I, in a low tone, for I was thinking of Doris’s mother.

But it did not strike Doris, she was not seriously inclined to-day, and took Mr. Chester’s words in a jesting light.

“Don’t be afraid, I shall never break your heart, Gabriel,” and she laughed; whilst I wondered how she could be so light-hearted on the eve of Mr. Chester’s departure. Certainly he would return; and days and weeks, nay, even months and years fly quickly enough away.

“You look a great deal more solemn than I do, Joyce,” said Doris; but Gabriel and I are used to partings: it’s like

old times to say 'good-bye' to one another; is it not?" and then I gave my hand to Mr. Chester, and wished him a pleasant journey and a speedy return.

"And don't lose the talisman," said Doris; "for though it has worked slowly it has worked well, and there is no telling what wonders it may yet perform."

I started, and Mr. Chester glanced curiously at me, but he betrayed no embarrassment. However, fearing any further remarks that might lead to a disclosure of what had happened to the talisman, I made my escape and waited in the porch-room until Mr. Chester should go away. Soon I heard the front door close and Doris's footstep on the stairs.

"He has gone," she said, unconcernedly, as she entered the room.

"And are you not sorry?" I asked, somewhat surprised at her manner.

"Well, of course I am not glad," she replied, sitting down beside me; "but he will be here again so soon."

"But if anything should happen to him?"

"No fear of that; Gabriel is able to take care of himself. Joyce," she continued, fixing her large dark eyes full upon me, "you will be my bridesmaid. Is that in your story?"

"Yes. Aunt Lotty suggested it, so I wrote it down."

"Aunt Lotty!" echoed Doris.

"Yes, Aunt Lotty."

“Oh,” rejoined Doris, drily. “And what did Uncle Carmichael say to the arrangement?”

“He said nothing, as the subject was not mentioned before him. But he thought that Mr. Chester was not good enough for you.”

“You know better than that, Joyce, with all your want of appreciation of him,” said she, springing up; “Gabriel is a great deal too good for me. No one can tell how good Gabriel is who does not know him as I have done.”

I was glad to see that she was not quite so indifferent as I was beginning to think her.

“Uncle Carmichael, indeed;” she exclaimed, “as if he were capable of understanding Gabriel. Night and day, darkness and light, fire and water, are not more unlike in their natures; I did not expect *him* to appreciate Gabriel, he is not noble enough to do so. Now dear, simple Aunt Lotty understands him by instinct. He is to her a hero, and she worships him accordingly.”

The idea of Aunt Lotty in connection with hero-worship had in it something so incongruous that I could not help smiling, neither could Doris avoid smiling in return, though she said, “Nevertheless, Joyce, I wish that you had a little more of Aunt Lotty’s spirit.”

It seems a hard proposition to set forth, but it appears to me that every one is more or less a hypocrite. So, at least, I felt, when by silence I in a manner assented to Doris’s remark. But there are some thoughts in every heart so care-

fully guarded that one feels a secret satisfaction when people receive a wrong impression. And so it was with me; and I close my diary to-night wondering whether the believers in the possibility of human perfection have ever sat down quietly and made a candid examination of their own hearts, as I have done.

CHAPTER XIV.

VISIONS OF THE PAST.

AS he sat in the solitude of his chamber Mr. Carmichael's thoughts reverted to the past. Solitude it was, though Aunt Lotty sat there with her endless knitting, for Aunt Lotty never spoke unless spoken to, so that her presence was no hinderance to the flow of his thoughts. Indeed, her steadily moving pins were rather suggestive of a progressive train of ideas. And Mr. Carmichael, propped up with cushions, pondered over the story of years long past. Strange that those days should come before him now, when his mind was oppressed with other matters; but so it was, those early days rose up before him as it were involuntarily; indeed, so subtly did they insinuate themselves that he scarcely seemed to himself to be thinking of them, but as if some voice whispered to him a tale that he had read in a half-forgotten book ages ago. And thus it began;—

“Far away, quite in the north of England—”

Yes, he remembered the place well, a lonesome farmhouse, with a straggling coppice on one side and a badly pruned orchard running to waste on the other. There were several

fine pear-trees whose fruit grew smaller and smaller every year, and damson-trees that every year yielded shorter crops, and apple-trees that were capricious in their bearing, sometimes surprising the owner with an unlooked-for supply of ruddy treasure, and sometimes disappointing him with a meagre crop of very inferior fruit. Though disappointing is hardly the correct word to use in reference to the matter, since the owner was so utterly broken down and used to disappointment, that the meagre supply appeared to him right and in the ordinary course of events, whilst the bounteous crop seemed a blessing so unlooked for as well-nigh to border upon a miracle. The farm buildings were out of repair and patched up with any old materials that came to hand. The fences were broken, and there were no proper fastenings to the gates. The duck-pond was covered with weeds, the ducks themselves were not so noisy as ducks and geese generally are; and the cock strutting about the yard had a somewhat crest-fallen air, as if he and his family were not cared for so well as they might have been.

The house itself partook of the general look of dilapidation: the shutters hung loosely on their hinges, the windows were patched in many places with brown paper, and the large low rooms were very scantily furnished. There was a strong-armed, rosy-cheeked country girl in the farm kitchen, who was the only house servant. A frail, delicate woman occasionally helped her, and employed the rest of her time in sewing, and in taking care of two boys who

played about, heedless of poverty and sorrow, though poverty and sorrow were around them.

This frail, delicate woman was the mistress. An old man lived in one of the out-houses, and did the whole of what farm-work there was to do. He was assisted in his labours by a tall, bent man, who rose early in the morning, and worked through the day as well as his waning strength and worn-out spirit would allow him.

This was the master, Thomas Carmichael—Hugh Carmichael's father. He had been getting poorer and poorer for many years. At first he had lived somewhat extravagantly, and had been too speculative and experimental, and now people said he understood nothing of farming, and would never make it pay, and that he had better give up the farm and take to something else; but Thomas Carmichael had not energy enough for this, besides his heart clave to the old homestead, and he could not bear to leave it.

So he struggled on; and, as time flew by on rapid wing, the pale, delicate woman grew thinner and paler, and the tall man stooped more than ever. The old serving man died, and his place was not supplied. Mr. Carmichael could not afford to pay for labour, and now that the lads were growing up they must do the work. So the lads worked and idled about the farm, which prospered neither better nor worse than it had done in former days.

There was an addition to the family within the last four

or five years, a little blue-eyed girl, who was playing on the hearth-rug in front of the kitchen fire, for the kitchen was now the keeping-room, since the furniture in the sitting-rooms had disappeared, and there was no rosy servant-girl to feel that her dominions were invaded by the presence of the family.

One winter-night the family had drawn close round the fire; the cold was intense, and the wind whistled round the house and shrieked so piteously in the wide chimney that one scarce liked to think of a human being wandering abroad on such a night.

And yet how many homeless wretches *are* abroad on nights like this, and how seldom do those whose heads are pillowed on downy couches give one thought to them, as they lie listening to the storm! How few thank heaven for the shelter they enjoy, whilst others shiver beneath the open sky, or lie down to die worn out with misery and wretchedness!

The Carmichaels huddled closer round the fire; their garments were somewhat threadbare, and not altogether suitable for such weather. Still there were others worse off than themselves, though it is doubtful whether they thought of this, or whether, if they had done so, it would have added to their warmth and comfort.

There came a feeble tap at the door, and one of the youths rose up to open it. A little boy was there, not more than eight years old. The mistress was surprised; she put

down her sewing, and drew the shivering child towards the fire.

“What do you want, Johnny?” said she; “it’s late for you to be out such a night as this. Did your mother send you?”

The child thus appealed to began to cry, very quietly at first, as children do, when they are frightened, but at length his sobs became uncontrollable, and he could do nothing but hide his face on the mistress’s shoulder. She quietly let him weep out his fright and sorrow, and then she asked him again, “What is the matter, Johnny?”

And Johnny, half-inclined to burst out afresh, restrained himself, “Mother cannot speak; she is quite cold, and she does not move, and I was frightened; so I came to fetch you.”

The mistress looked at her husband.

“Will you go, and I’ll keep Johnny here.”

And Thomas Carmichael and his elder son went to the widow’s cottage, and found, as they expected, that Johnny’s mother was dead.

“We can’t turn the child adrift,” said the mistress, “he’s no friends, that I ever heard of.”

And so John Gresford stayed at the farmhouse. The younger lad, Charles, was kind enough to him, but Hugh, the elder, disliked him from the first, and, taking advantage of the boy’s dependant position, tyrannised over him.

Here Mr. Carmichael moved restlessly amidst his cushions, and Aunt Lotty approached to see if he wanted anything.

“No.”

So Aunt Lotty went on with her knitting, and Mr. Carmichael listened again to the voice that still went on speaking. It is not pleasant to remember quarrels and difficulties in which one has always been on the wrong side. Mr. Carmichael felt this, but he did not feel willing to acknowledge it. He tried to wrap his robe of self-exoneration tightly round him, but somehow it was too scanty, and, try as he would, he could not get it to meet.

“The lad was always in my way,” he muttered to himself; “always has been—is now.”

And Mr. Carmichael groaned.

“Oh, dear!” said Aunt Lotty, “I do wish you would not worry yourself over that letter. No one cares about it; you’ve done all that mortal man could do to get Doris her rights, and you’re not to blame if it’s lost.”

Mr. Carmichael clutched the counterpane; a spasm passed over his face, he spoke thickly and hurriedly.

“I wish you would mind your own affairs; who thinks I care about the letter, I should like to know? What does it matter to me? What makes you talk about it?”

Aunt Lotty was frightened by his manner.

“Does any one say I care about it?” he demanded.

"No, not any one," replied Aunt Lotty.

"Of course not, why should they?" asked Mr. Carmichael.

"I don't know; but no one does. No one ever said anything to me about it."

"Then never mention it to me again."

And Aunt Lotty relapsed into silence.

Mr. Carmichael passed over many years in his meditations, and paused at the last episode in his North of England reminiscences. The tall bent man was in his grave. John Gresford and Charles Carmichael had been in Australia for nearly two years, and Hugh and his mother and Nelly were at the farm.

"It's of no use," said he, "there's not capital enough to keep it on, the farm must be sold, and I'll go and join Charley."

"Sell the old place, Hugh?" answered his mother, "it's been a long time in the family."

"And much good it has done them of late years. We managed to starve upon it during my father's lifetime, but now I'll have done with it; I want to live. You and Nelly may stay if you like, but I've made up my mind to go. James Withers has written and offered me a place there."

"John Gresford's uncle might help you," said Mrs. Carmichael, musingly.

"He's not helped John much, for he's roughing it pretty

well out there. Neither he nor Charley has had much luck at present. Besides I don't want to be patronised by a Gresford," he added, somewhat sulkily.

"But it would be no patronage, only paying back what we've done for the lad."

"Yes, they let him lie on our hands long enough," he muttered.

"And what harm did it do us, Hugh?" broke in Nelly, a tall fair-haired girl of eighteen; "he earned every bit of bread he ever ate upon the farm, and you didn't sweeten it to him. Why you hated him so I never could tell."

"That's neither here nor there," retorted her brother, "because your eyes were blinded, mine were not. If it's true that some of his people are as well off as it is said, they might have found him out, and have taken to him long ago, that's all I say. I know nothing of them, and don't care for them; and as to being indebted to anyone of the name of Gresford, I never will be. You and Nelly can stay on the farm, mother, till I am settled, and then I'll send for you."

Nelly tossed her head.

"I know what you mean," said he; "but if you ever marry John Gresford, I shall look upon you as no sister of mine."

"I *shall* marry John Gresford," returned the girl, quietly; "it's a promise, and nothing on earth will induce me to break it."

“And when is the marriage to take place?” asked Hugh Carmichael, sneeringly.

“As soon as he is making money enough to marry,” she returned, steadily.

“Be it so,” replied her brother, “the choice lies between your brother and your lover. You must give up one or the other. I hate him! he’s a mean-spirited ——”

“Hush!” exclaimed Nelly, springing up and placing her hand on his mouth; “you shan’t speak ill of him; it’s enough that you’ve hated him, and ill-treated him whilst he was here, for no earthly reason except that he was better than you are. But you shan’t speak against him now that he’s far away; and for aught we know,” she continued sadly, “for aught we know, may be lying dead at the present moment!”

“A good thing if he were,” said Hugh Carmichael, bitterly; “and as many an idle word comes true, and it may be as you say, I’ll not speak evil of the dead; but you shall choose to-day between him and me which you will give up.”

“Hugh, you are so unreasonable—so hard,” pleaded the girl, her sudden passion leaving her; “why need I give up either? Why cannot you forget bygones, and let us live peaceably one with another?”

But Hugh Carmichael was implacable.

“No!” said he; “you must choose between us.”

“I cannot give up John,” said Ellen Carmichael.

And there it ended; and Hugh Carmichael went abroad,

and never saw his sister again until she lay upon her death-bed.

Mrs. Carmichael did not live long after her son's departure, and after her death the farm was sold, and Nelly went to live with some friends of her father's.

Hugh Carmichael and John Gresford met in Australia. And the incident recalled by James Withers rose vividly to Mr. Carmichael's memory, together with many other incidents that he would have preferred to forget; incidents that had not softened the enmity that was in his heart, but rather tended to increase it, and the help that he was more than once necessitated to receive, and which the younger man, for Ellen's sake and out of gratitude to the family, was thankful to accord, was ungenerously accepted, and at length the coldness that had always subsisted between them grew into open enmity, and John Gresford and Hugh Carmichael became as strangers to one another.

But Mr. Carmichael was growing weary, very weary. He would not trouble himself with the past any longer. Indeed, the past died away as though a hand had drawn a heavy curtain before it which he was too weak to undraw. Yet, for a moment, feeble and weary as he was, his thoughts reverted to the present. Poverty and struggling were so far away that he could not realise them now. The two adventurers, or, rather, workers after fortune, were rich men; the world had prospered with them and brought them, in these later days together, and an olive branch was waving

over them. They were at peace. The breach was made up; trespasses were forgiven, forgotten. Peace, peace.

“Is it peace?” asked the Voice of Mr. Carmichael.

“Not peace, but revenge.”

“Revenge!”

The voice dwelt lingeringly upon the word, and rang the changes upon it in tones that sounded now sweet, now bitter, triumphant, mocking, palliating, as though Mr. Carmichael should taste of it in all its phases, and having tasted, be satisfied. Like a never-ending peal of bells it rang and rang, until he was almost maddened, for he heard it in doubt and dread; revenge was not quite accomplished even yet. What if at the last moment he should fail. And Mr. Carmichael, exhausted, sank back into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

A VILLAGE DOCTOR.

IT was some days before Mr. Carmichael had sufficiently recovered to leave his room, and it would apparently be some weeks before he could leave the house. And to a man of Mr. Carmichael's temperament this close confinement was inexpressibly irksome, and also it placed him in a dependent position; Aunt Lotty was a devoted nurse; and a man less selfish than Mr. Carmichael would have been touched by her untiring zeal, but he, like all selfish men, was intent upon himself alone; and if he noticed her attention at all, it was merely when the accidental withdrawal of it made him sensible that it was essential to him. She still cherished the idea that the lost letter was preying upon his mind, though she dared not hint at such a supposition in his presence. But to Joyce she confided her opinions.

"I wish, dear, that we could hear from Mr. Chester, for Mr. Carmichael will never be himself again until that letter is either lost or found."

Little did she anticipate all that should happen before Doris's packet would ultimately be recovered. Fate had

not decreed its recovery at present, and when Mr. Chester wrote from Rome, he mentioned that, having searched everywhere for it without success, he had given it up as hopeless. Whereupon Mr. Carmichael professed due regret; but Joyce, watching him carefully, had small faith in his professions. He rubbed his hands feebly, and was less irritable during the day, Aunt Lotty thought she perceived a favourable change altogether.

“He walks more steadily,” said she, “and his appetite has been better; he ate a slice of fowl and drank a glass of sherry immediately after reading the letter, and he took it with a relish that he’s not had for his food a good while. He’ll be all right now that it’s settled. There’s nothing so wearing as suspense; wondering and wondering, and worrying, and thinking, and never coming to any conclusion. He’ll be all right now.”

But Joyce knew better, for the doctor had called her aside a few days after Mr. Chester’s departure.

“Miss Dormer,” he said, “I shall be glad of a few minutes’ conversation with you.”

“Yes.”

“My dear young lady,” he went on, “I fear that Mr. Carmichael is in a very doubtful state of health.”

Joyce was startled; she was not quite prepared for such an announcement.

“Do you mean,” she asked, “that there is any immediate danger?”

“I won’t say positive danger at present,” replied Dr. Bennett; “but I have very serious apprehensions for the future. I think it not unlikely that Mr. Carmichael may never get over this illness; mind, I won’t say positively,—it never does to speak too decidedly on any matter; therefore I will not give a positive opinion. But any agitation may cause a relapse, and then the worst is to be feared.”

“Does my aunt know this?”

“No; and from what I have seen of your aunt it is not desirable that she should know it. It would do no good, and would probably incapacitate her, and she might unwittingly produce the effect so much to be dreaded.”

“Poor Aunt Lotty!”

The doctor made no answer. He had attended Mr. and Mrs. Carmichael ever since they had been married, and knew something of domestic life at Green Oake.

“I may depend upon you to send for me at once if you see the slightest change in Mr. Carmichael.”

“Certainly. But, Dr. Bennett, do you fear anything immediate,” asked Joyce. “Do you think that he will——die?” She hesitated when she came to the last word, it seemed so awful, so sudden, so unexpected. “You don’t think he will die. He is not an old man—surely he will not die?”

But Dr. Bennett was a doctor, and consequently would not commit himself to anything decided. He chose to be vague,

and yet by his vagueness he perhaps produced the impression that he intended to produce.

And not only was he a doctor, but a country doctor; and the country doctor, though of the same genus as the town doctor, is a different species, the difference lying in a great measure in the definite and indefinite article. The doctor in the town being *a* doctor, one of many—the doctor in the country being *the* doctor—complete in himself. Hence the importance, the fussiness, the diplomacy, the mysteriousness of the country doctor. The people are in his hands; there is no appeal from him; he cannot be lightly dismissed and another take his place. However, if the country doctor, despite his village-acquired importance, be a kind-hearted conscientious man, all works well; but if, on the contrary, he be one with whose temper and crotchets the parish has to make painful acquaintance, the result is anything but agreeable.

Dr. Bennett was of the former type, but still he could not wholly divest his mind of the fact that he was *the* doctor, and that there was no other within ten miles of Craythorpe. Therefore he was a little peremptory in his manner, though he covered it tolerably with a garb of suavity.

His wife was a brisk, active little woman, with a strong belief in the infallibility of her husband, whose dogmas she allowed no one but herself to contradict.

The doctor and his wife did not live in Craythorpe, but in the next parish, where Dr. Bennett's principal practice

lay. The practice was on the whole more extensive than profitable, but as he and his wife had no family, it was sufficient for their moderate requirements.

Joyce had never seen Mrs. Bennett; the intercourse between Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Carmichael being limited to two state morning visits in the course of the year. Thus far had their acquaintance progressed, and no farther, or rather, here it had remained stationary.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Bennett looked upon Mrs. Carmichael as one of her circle of friends, and spoke of Green Oake as though she were in constant communication with it. Not from any desire to misrepresent facts, but simply that owing to the doctor's being frequently there, she heard all that was going on, and identifying herself with him, she felt that, as the doctor's wife, she had a share of the doctor's importance and intimacy with people. She crept beneath the folds of his professional mantle, believing that it was as much hers as his, for in the country there is much simplicity of faith and primitiveness of mind and feeling.

Truly in the country does one recognise Carlyle's quaint proposition that "the Fraction of Life can be increased in value, not so much by increasing your Numerator as by lessening your Denominator."

Mrs. Bennett and Aunt Lotty demonstrated this theorem without being aware of it; for the simple mind is unconsciously philosophic; philosophy being after all but a striving after the nearest approach to primitive happiness—the

happiness felt before wants are known; the happiness felt when wants have been found to fall short of satisfying the mind; when illusions have been dispelled and difficulties and disappointments battled through, the philosopher lessens the Denominator in his Fraction of Life and sits down contented.

The simple-minded are, however, instinctively philosophers, and Mrs. Bennett and Aunt Lotty, having made their "claim to wages a Zero," had the world under their feet. Certainly they did not make their claim in the way that higher souls would make it, neither in so true and noble a sense had they the world beneath their tread. Not through self-renunciation attained to through death-throes and tears of agony; but passively, through ignorance of there being more to desire than they possessed.

Yet thus do the simple and the wise meet through different experiences at the same conclusion; for truth is ever true, and the paths leading up to it must always end in light. Nevertheless, we would give the palm to the wise; and acknowledge, that greater are they who having groped in darkness, have won through bitter strife the boon of light, than they upon whom the light has been for ever shining.

But to return. Mrs. Bennett took a lively interest in Joyce and Doris, though she had only seen Doris once and Joyce not at all. But the doctor had told her so much about them that she felt as if she and they were well acquainted.

“A great blessing it must be for poor Mrs. Carmichael to have her nieces with her. A dull enough life she has had these many years,” observed Mr. Bennett; “if you had been such a formal, solemn person as Mr. Carmichael, I should have died long ago. It’s a sad thing for a woman to be so afraid of her husband.”

“I don’t know,” responded the doctor, “a little due deference——”

“Due deference, indeed!” interrupted his wife. “It’s undue deference, and nothing better! Is a woman never to say a word in her own defence, I should like to know? And that’s what Mrs. Carmichael never does. I’m sure one feels all the better for speaking out sometimes. A little tiff now and then does no harm;—it gives one an impetus. But poor Mrs. Carmichael! I don’t suppose she ever had a tiff in all her life. Well, well, some women are meek beyond meekness; but I’m not one of them.”

“No, my dear,” said the doctor, with a twinkle in his eye.

Mrs. Bennett looked up quickly, and then a twinkle stole into hers also, and she smiled.

“Well, if I’ve a little spirit sometimes it soon blows over and no one is the worse for it. But poor Mrs. Carmichael has no spirit, and I dare say now that Mr. Carmichael is ill, he’s a greater tyrant than ever.”

Dr. Bennett looked grave. “He’ll not tyrannise very much longer over any one, Martha.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mrs. Bennett hastily. “Is Mr. Carmichael so ill as that?”

“There will be a death in that house before many months are over,” responded the doctor, oracularly.

“Poor thing—poor thing!” said Mrs. Bennett, veering round on a fresh tack. “She’ll miss him greatly. She’s wrapped up in that husband of hers, and I believe thinks as much of him as I do of you.”

“Very likely, Martha; we all see with the eyes we bring with us to see, and I’m sure it’s a great mercy; or Heaven knows what would become of a good many.”

“Does *she* know it?”

“No; but I have hinted it to Miss Dormer.”

“Ah! a good sensible girl that Miss Dormer seems to be. If it weren’t too early to be thinking of such things I should say she would make Mr. Lynn a very good wife.”

“Mr. Lynn!” echoed Dr. Bennett, aghast. “Why he is so depressed and in such a nervous state that if he’d not gone away for a change I should have had him on my hands as well. No, no; don’t trouble yourself upon that head. Mr. Lynn will never marry again.”

“I don’t know that,” returned Mrs. Bennett, unwilling to be shaken in her theory. “To be sure it’s Miss Carmichael that’s for ever backwards and forwards at Lynn-court, and the children they say are almost as fond of her as they were of their mother; but then she’s engaged. I don’t understand it. I should like to know about this

mysterious business that has led to such an intimacy between Mr. Lynn and Mr. Carmichael, when they've hated each other for the last seven years; though why they should have taken such an unaccountable dislike to one another at first sight I cannot imagine."

"It may not have been at first sight, Martha," suggested the doctor; "they may not have been strangers as we supposed."

"True," returned his wife; "I never thought of that. But," said she, reverting to Mr. Carmichael's illness, "it's a lonely thing for those three helpless creatures to be with a dying man. Mrs. Carmichael's as inexperienced as a child."

"I don't think Miss Dormer is helpless," said Dr. Bennett.

"Perhaps not; still I think the next time you go over to Green Oake I'll drive with you. It's out of the time for visits, but I'm sure Mrs. Carmichael wouldn't take it amiss, and her husband need never know of it; and I might be of some use to them when their day of trouble comes."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEATH ANGEL.

WHEN the day of trouble comes! It was nearer than even Dr. Bennett anticipated. If we were so spiritually organised as to be able to open our eyes on the invisible world, we should see close beside each human being a dark figure with outstretched hand, just ready to lay upon its victim's shoulder.

Trouble is very near us in this world, though oftentimes by a wise dispensation we know not how near. Happy for us that its footfall is so light we cannot hear it until it is close upon us! Happy for us that its voice is so low and indistinct that it has not strength to breathe into our ears the secrets of to-morrow! Happy for us that until we are writhing in its iron grasp the outstretched hand is invisible.

True, with some over-sensitive natures there are occasionally dark forebodings, as though the shadow of the future had fallen upon their hearts. Men laugh at presentiments; but are men wise in doing so? Because other natures are more susceptible than their own, is it a reason for disbelief? Nay, let it rather be a matter of thankfulness that there are

so few that hear the far-off flutter of the gloomy figure's wings, or else how sad the world would be. And men would walk in sombre garments, grieving hopelessly over the untried future.

Aunt Lotty, as she placidly tended Mr. Carmichael, had no apprehension of the dark Presence that silently and all unseen accompanied her from room to room. The Dormer nature was too strong to allow of supernatural impressions, else she might have heard a voice saying, "Before many days are over thou shalt stand face to face with the Death-Angel." But Aunt Lotty was saved from this, and it was well, for trouble, however long warded off, comes ever too soon.

But Joyce, with keener sense, and with fears awakened by Dr. Bennett's speech, sat waiting and dreading every moment what might happen in the next. So when Aunt Lotty announced that Mr. Carmichael was much better to-day, well enough to leave his room, she experienced no throb of hope, for she felt that the words that had fallen from Dr. Bennett's lips admitted of no appeal.

Doris had gone to Lynncourt to see her little brothers, and Joyce sat wondering why she was so long away, just when she wanted her, for she felt that it would be a relief to her to have some one to speak to, some one that she need not try to command her feelings with, for she scarcely dare trust herself to talk to Aunt Lotty, who was willing enough to chat on the improved state of her husband's health. She

looked at her watch. One o'clock! Surely Doris could not be away much longer, she had already been more than two hours at Lynncourt. She went to the window, but Doris was not in sight.

There was a little bustle on the stair-case. It was Mr. Carmichael going down very slowly, very heavily, Empson assisting him, and Aunt Lotty following. She would go and see him when he was settled in the drawing-room. She did not know how many times she might see him again alive. He was a doomed man, and no one in the house knew it but herself. The knowledge was becoming quite painful to her; she felt as though she must tell some one. Why had Mr. Bennett made her so wretched when what was going to happen might be months off? Was she to drag through weary weeks of watching for evil? It would have been different, she argued, if she had held a different opinion of Mr. Carmichael, if she could understand his life better, if she could get rid of the undefined feeling of dislike and distrust with which she regarded him,—above all, if she could divest herself of the suspicion that he was even now guilty of some wrong deed that he feared to have discovered.

Doris, entering the little porch-room, found her pale and careworn.

“What is the matter, Joyce?”

Joyce started up.

“When is Mr. Lynn coming home?” she asked, pursuing

her own train of ideas, without taking any notice of Doris's question.

"Mr. Lynn! what can he have to do with your looking so wretched?"

"Nothing. Do I look wretched?"

"Miserable; as pale as a ghost! Just as I ought to look, I suppose; for if you were in my place, I should say you were fretting after Gabriel."

If Joyce had been pale before, she had colour enough now, for the blood flushed up in her face till it was burning crimson.

"No, I am not," she answered, quickly.

Doris half-smiled.

"Well, you are not pale now, certainly; and ready enough, too, to free yourself from such an accusation. Poor Gabriel! No one frets after him much. Do you know, Joyce, I feel perfectly content although he is away. Quite as happy upon the whole as when he is here. Is not that strange?"

"I wish he were here," said Joyce, involuntarily.

Doris stared at her. "You are the strangest person, Joyce."

But Joyce heeded not her remark. She said abruptly, "Do you remember saying it would be a good thing if Mr. Carmichael were to die, Doris?"

"Ah! did I? I had forgotten it," replied Doris, carelessly: "one speaks without thinking sometimes."

"Do you wish it now?" asked Joyce, in a slow, measured one.

"Joyce!"

But Joyce repeated her question, even more deliberately than before.

"Wish it? of course I don't. I shouldn't have said it if I had taken into account the real meaning of it."

"I am glad to hear it."

Doris took a long look at her companion, whose pallid face seemed struggling to preserve a semblance of composure very much at variance with some hidden emotion that was agitating her. And as she looked, an undefined feeling of awe took possession of her, as though heart had spoken to heart, though no word had been uttered; as though Joyce's heart were in some way dimly reflected in her own, as in the rippled water the face below tremulously answers to the overbending face above.

"There is something the matter, Joyce," she said; "will you tell me what it is?"

"You don't wish *that* now, Doris; you are quite sure?"

"Wish it? No, Joyce; how can you think that I ever could have wished it seriously. It would be almost murder to wish a thing so deliberately as you appear to think I wished that."

"It would."

"You are not well, Joyce; you've never looked yourself since my foolish flight. I can't imagine what is the matter with you. If it is any satisfaction to you to hear it, Uncle

Carmichael may live to the age of Methuselah for all I care, and I hope he will find happiness in it."

"I don't think there would be much happiness in that," sighed Joyce; "but he will not live, Doris. Dr. Bennett thinks he will never get over this illness."

Joyce had spoken Dr. Bennett's thoughts rather than his words; but she had done so unconsciously, her mind having been impressed by his manner rather than by anything however decided that he might have said.

"Uncle Carmichael dying!" exclaimed Doris, with a shudder.

"Hush, Doris! no one knows. Dr. Bennett would not let Aunt Lotty be told; he said it would do no good. Besides, it may not be yet. Another attack may not come on for some time. But I can't get rid of a weight that is weighing me down. I believe that Dr. Bennett knows it is nearer than he liked to say."

The two girls drew closer together.

"Poor Aunt Lotty!"

"Joyce," said Doris, "I shall send for Mr. Lynn, for my father; he ought to be here."

* * * *

And on, and on, came the dark shadow, but Aunt Lotty did not perceive that the dusk was setting in—that the grey evening tide was creeping near—the twilight deepening before the night closed in. Slowly but surely the Death-angel approached; the hours were measured out; there was

no need for him to hurry on his journey, he should arrive in time; for Hugh Carmichael had yet some days to live.

Joyce, with a sickening at her heart, awaited his advent. Already she felt the chilling influence he spread around; and ever in her ears sounded the words that Hugh Carmichael had heard so often, and the response he had so many times repeated—"From sudden death, *Good Lord, deliver us!*" So many times repeated without giving it a serious thought. He had never contemplated sudden death in connection with himself. Few men do; they take it for granted that their own will be an ordinary death with due warning. Yet death was near!—he must die!—die with the burden that was heavy on his soul!—die with his evil feelings still unrepented of, his sins unforgiven. Ah! who was she that should thus map out his iniquities and judge him? Who was she that she should condemn?—and yet she could not help it, for stronger than her charity rose up conviction.

Her opinion of Mr. Carmichael was unchanged; and he was dying, and he knew it not! And if she told him the shock might be too much for him. What should she do? Backwards and forwards she paced the narrow limits of the little porch-room, trying to calm herself, and decide what best was to be done.

Suddenly a bell rang; and she heard the servants moving to and fro. She opened the door and listened. Some one ascended the stairs. It was Sarah coming to tell her some-

thing that she knew already. No need for her to see the white face or hear the words—

“The master is worse, Miss.”

“Yes, Sarah. Send off for Dr. Bennett.”

Then she descended quietly to the drawing-room. In a moment all her agitation was calmed. Suspense was over!—the worst had come! She must act now. And she gave directions about Mr. Carmichael, and soothed Aunt Lotty, who was as helpless almost as a child.

“And he was so much better this morning,” moaned Aunt Lotty; “and now he’s worse than he’s ever been. I’m afraid he’s very ill indeed.”

Mr. Carmichael *was* very ill, and Dr. Bennett held out but little hope. Towards midnight he rallied slightly, and soon after fell into a heavy sleep. And the Death-angel watching by Mr. Carmichael’s pillow stayed his hand, for the time was not yet come.

CHAPTER XVII.

“FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES.”

SLEEP brought no refreshment to Mr. Carmichael; his slumbers, though protracted, had been fitful and uneasy, and when he awoke he dozed off again, apparently unable to shake off the lethargy that hung upon him. Patient Aunt Lotty sat in the shade of the bed-curtains, where she could watch her husband without being seen by him, for he had manifested a sudden aversion to her presence. The sight of Doris seemed also to cause him annoyance, therefore Doris did not venture into the sick-chamber. In Joyce alone he appeared to have confidence, though why this should be was surprising to her, since she had been the one to evince distrust of him, and this she knew Mr. Carmichael had more than suspected. Possibly, however, the fact that she read him better than the others might afford him some inexplicable relief, and he might even feel thankful that she had partly penetrated his secret; that secret which it was now beyond his power to reveal. For the strong man was utterly prostrate as he lay breathing heavily with half-unclosed eyes, and almost powerless limbs, and very little of consciousness about him, though now and then he made a faint

effort to rouse himself, and his lips moved slightly, as though he would speak, but the words he would have uttered died away in imperfect sounds.

Once he opened his eyes wide and gazed anxiously at Joyce, his lips worked as though he were endeavouring to tell her something, which she, drawing near, stooped down to listen to; but all in vain, for in spite of the earnestness with which he strove to make himself understood, she could catch no articulate words. Aunt Lotty's tears flowed fast, and she sobbed aloud. She drew the curtain back: "What is it? oh! what is it?" said she, half pushing Joyce away, "perhaps I can understand him."

And she bent over the sick man, whose strength had gone whilst hers was left. Her awe of him had vanished; she was now his protector, his guardian, he was so helpless. But she could understand him no better than Joyce, yet with a little touch of quiet dignity that at once moved and surprised her niece, she said,—

"I think, dear, I have a right to be here."

"You have, Aunt Lotty," returned Joyce; "it is your place and yours alone."

"But you must help me, Joyce."

"Yes," replied Joyce, "no one else shall come near." For she still believed that there was some revelation that the dying man would try to make; for that he was dying was plain to see, though the fact in all its fulness had not yet entered into Aunt Lotty's mind.

Mr. Carmichael, exhausted with his efforts, again sank into a lethargic sleep, from which at intervals he partially awoke with a gasp, and stared wildly round. But he did not try to speak again. In one of these intervals, after a hopeless, imploring glance at Joyce, his eye fell upon a letter in Mr. Lynn's handwriting; his eye dwelt upon it, and then again he looked at Joyce. Suddenly an idea struck her; she wondered it had not occurred to her before. He wished to see Mr. Lynn—of course he did, the secret must be in some way connected with his sister. How far was she right, and how could she convey comfort without arousing suspicion? for Aunt Lotty was eagerly watching every change of his countenance. Then Joyce wondered whether Mr. Carmichael would hear, would understand her words. Yes, he must be capable of understanding, or wherefore the imploring look that had almost framed itself into a speech. "I think, Aunt Lotty, that Mr. Carmichael would like to know that Mr. Lynn is expected to-night," she whispered, in order to prepare Mrs. Carmichael for what she was about to say; then turning to Mr. Carmichael, she said slowly and distinctly,—

"Doris thinks that Mr. Lynn will be at home to-night."

Her intuition had evidently been correct, for a slight expression of satisfaction passed over Mr. Carmichael's face, and he remained quiet for a long time. And Aunt Lotty, watching him, felt her heart go out towards him; felt that he was all the world to her, and that she could not bear to

part with him. Strange, one would think, after the life that she had led; fraught with so little affection on his part, to draw forth such devotion. But so it was; she had drawn up her own creed respecting him, and had held tenaciously to it through everything. In her estimation Mr. Carmichael could do no wrong; the fault lay in her own inferiority, and so she had worshipped the cold, selfish man, prizing the scanty crumbs he now and then vouchsafed to throw to her; and, as he lay there helpless, Aunt Lotty longed that he could speak but one word of pardon to her for any failure of duty she might have been guilty of.

“I can’t think of anything myself,” mused poor Aunt Lotty; “but I dare say Mr. Carmichael would be able to tell me of numbers and numbers of things I’ve done wrong, if he could only speak. I was always so stupid in seeing anything myself. Ah! if he’d had a better wife.” And poor Aunt Lotty in her humiliation could have gone down on her knees and besought forgiveness for all her involuntary offences.

Dr. Bennett looked grave when he saw his patient. “I will be in again in the evening,” he said.

And Joyce, slipping after him, inquired, “Is there hope?”

“None; he is sinking fast.”

“How long can he last?”

“He *may* live until to-morrow morning.”

Then Joyce began to calculate whether Mr. Lynn could arrive in time. With the utmost expedition, and provided the trains fitted in, he might reach Craythorpe by midnight,

not before. Never had a day appeared so supernaturally long. The clock seemed to pause between every tick it made, as though the moments had suddenly become too precious to part with lightly.

Aunt Lotty stole softly to the fire-place where Joyce was standing. "Joyce, dear, what does Dr. Bennett say?"

"We can do nothing but watch," returned Joyce, partially evading the question.

But Aunt Lotty was not satisfied: with a little sob, she said, "Joyce, dear, you would not deceive me at such a time as this. Is there *no* hope?" And she gazed wistfully into Joyce's face, as though Joyce were the arbiter of life and death; her whole figure was trembling, and her hand convulsively grasped one of Joyce's. "The truth, dear," she pleaded; "I'll try to bear it."

"Aunt Lotty, dear Aunt Lotty," answered Joyce, throwing her arms around her, "we can do nothing but watch."

Very quietly Aunt Lotty disengaged herself from Joyce's embrace; very quietly she returned to the bedside, and seating herself there, tenderly took one of Mr. Carmichael's hands, and held it as though by so doing she could still keep him with her. Joyce could see that she never took her eyes from him as he lay breathing uneasily, and moaning feebly from time to time.

Mr. Carmichael was dying!

And there was something on his mind, something that he wished to get rid of before he died; and yet, was he aware

that he was dying? Does a man always know when death comes so near? Is there always a prophetic voice that sounds the warning in the dullest ears? If so, he might perhaps have heard it, and the awful voice have urged upon him, "Unburden thy soul; repent before it is too late." Vainly it urged, for he would never speak again.

Dr. Bennett came in the evening, but he could do no good; so he went down-stairs and sat with Doris, who was quite banished from the sick-room, as a nervous horror seemed to creep over Mr. Carmichael whenever he saw her. And yet she was his sister's child. Aunt Lotty could not understand it.

But an inkling of the truth was dawning upon Joyce, yet how would it be ever known? He was growing feebler, and midnight was approaching. Whether would Mr. Lynn arrive in time or not?

She listened and listened. The rain was falling steadily with a heavy drip—plash! plash!—so monotonously that it was torture to her to hear it. She seemed to feel each drop burst and split into fragments that were driving into her brain.

At length she fancied she heard the distant rumbling of a carriage, but whether coming towards Green Oake or going away from it she could not tell. Now it came nearer and nearer, and then it died away. She was listening so intently that she could scarce tell whether the sounds were real or imaginary. It was quite painful. She put her hands

over her ears for a moment to shut them out; then she listened again. No; there was nothing. Yes; there had been a stoppage: and now she could hear the sound of wheels distinctly again. Doris had heard it too, for the dining-room door opened, and then the hall-door. Doris was looking out. Mr. Lynn had come. Yes; Mr. Lynn had set off the moment he received Doris's letter, and had travelled without stopping. He was just in time. Mr. Carmichael languidly opened his eyes.

"Mr. Lynn has come," said Joyce, stepping to the bedside, not knowing whether he would understand or not.

But Mr. Carmichael did understand, and it seemed as if a momentary vigour were imparted to him. He half raised himself. Aunt Lotty was astonished, and thought that after all he must be stronger than the doctor thought. But Joyce knew differently. Mr. Carmichael was still in his half-raised position when Mr. Lynn knocked at the door. Joyce opened it.

Mr. Carmichael's eyes dilated as he looked upon his ancient foe, so lately brought into friendly contact with him. Did old memories flash into his mind, as people say they do into the minds of dying men, carrying him back through long, long years upon the rapid wings of thought?

Mr. Lynn took the feeble hand of the dying man in his, and the dying man looked up at him. Then came the terrible struggle for words; the shrinking horror, when he

found he could not utter them; and the heavy perspiration stood on his brow. Aunt Lotty turned away her face.

“Aunt Lotty,” whispered Joyce, “won’t you go down for a few minutes whilst Mr. Lynn is here?”

Aunt Lotty shook her head.

“But it will do you good. You won’t be able to hold out,” and Joyce gently drew her away.

She gave her into Doris’s keeping, and then returned to Mr. Carmichael. When she entered the room she found Mr. Lynn still standing where she had left him, gazing in mute compassion on the sick man, who was hopelessly endeavouring to make himself understood.

During the last few hours Joyce had been pondering deeply, and as she caught the beseeching glance of Mr. Carmichael fixed upon her, her resolution was made, and, as if by inspiration, she took the part of interpreter. Bending down, she said, in a calm, distinct tone,—

“You would ask Mr. Lynn’s forgiveness?”

A sudden gleam lighted for a moment the dull eyes of the dying man. Mr. Lynn would have spoken, but Joyce motioned him to be silent, and again she spoke. Clear and solemn sounded her voice; so solemn that she was almost awed by it herself, but some irresistible impulse carried her on.

“There is some trouble on your mind—some revelation you would make, were it in your power. It is not for me to know what this secret is, but I believe it to be in some

way connected with the packet that Doris had from her mother.”

Mr. Lynn started, and Mr. Carmichael’s dull eyes still gleamed with a strange, wild intelligence; and Joyce continued:—

“You have in some way injured Mr. Lynn, and you would ask forgiveness at his hands for that unknown injury, which now will never be revealed until the secrets of all hearts are made known. Mr. Lynn,” she continued, will you give full and free forgiveness to Mr. Carmichael for any wrong he may have committed against you?” and the dying man’s eyes still shone with the strange hopeless light.

Mr. Lynn hesitated for a moment. The past, with all its wrongs, rose up before him. What new injury could this man have added under the garb of friendship? Joyce saw the hesitation and understood it, and involuntarily the words escaped from her lips—“As we forgive them that trespass against us.”

Mr. Lynn was not conscious that she had spoken; the words fell dreamily upon his ears, as though some distant voice were whispering them; and his mind wandered far back to the time when he, little motherless child, had said his prayers at Mr. Carmichael’s knee, and the mother of the dying man had been a mother unto him.

Then the dark shadow passed from his face, he gently took Mr. Carmichael’s powerless hand within his own.

“Hugh Carmichael,” he said, “I forgive you for all known

and unknown injuries, as freely as I hope to obtain forgiveness of my own. May God forgive me as I forgive you."

The gleam of light in the dull eyes shot forth once more, once more the lips essayed to move, but in vain. The head sank back on the pillow, one gasp, one choking sob, and Hugh Carmichael had breathed his last. He was dead, and his secret had died with him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOURNERS AT A FUNERAL.

IT was all over. Mr. Carmichael was dead and buried. The funeral train had passed in solemn procession through the village, and the rustics standing at their doors to watch had all agreed that Mr. Carmichael's respectability was done justice, to that he was buried as a gentleman ought to be. Oh, ye simple-minded, how little you heeded the satire conveyed in your opinion.

It was a spectacle that afforded the village much satisfaction; there had never been such a funeral in Craythorpe before. The children gazed at it with awe and admiration, and played at funerals for full a week afterwards. The hearse, covered with nodding plumes, was drawn by four black horses, whose mourning trappings almost touched the ground; the mutes, with lugubrious faces, marched with a slow and stately step, and the mourning-coaches came at even distances and moved at an even pace along. They had galloped in from Winstowe in the morning, but they were not on duty then. They had put up at the "Lynn Arms," where refreshment was served to man and beast. The mutes were

jovial at that time, so was the undertaker, and so were the drivers of the hearse and coaches. But the undertaker was not jovial now, he looked as though he had lost his dearest friend on earth, and was consequently duly disconsolate. The mutes too were sombre enough; their mouths were drawn into a serious and somewhat suffering expression, and their eyes were bent upon the ground, save now and then when they gravely looked up with a slightly reproachful glance, as much as to say, "No one can accuse us of not performing our part with all due propriety." And yet, no sooner was the funeral over, than they might be seen taking a parting-glass at the "Lynn Arms," after which the drivers cracked their whips, and they rattled back to Winstowe as merrily as though they had been engaged in a more enlivening ceremony.

Still, despite this irreverence when off duty, the proceedings had been conducted in a very creditable manner. Not a single point of funeral etiquette had been unobserved, not a single hitch had occurred, "everything went off well," to use the undertaker's own words, and he could not help congratulating himself upon the fact that the whole affair had been a complete success. In which opinion he was fully seconded by the inhabitants of Craythorpe. And in which opinion also coincided Aunt Lotty's relatives, who had come over to support her on the occasion; and who, in the true Dormer spirit, were very fastidious in such matters.

Mrs. Letheby, Aunt Lotty's eldest sister, folding up her

husband's hat-band and scarf, remarked to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Dormer, "That she was thankful everything had gone off so satisfactorily. From the coffin to the breakfast nothing could have been nicer. Poor Lotty knows so little of how to do things that it is surprising that everything had been so well managed. To be sure there was nothing like employing people who understood the business, and the man at Winstowe evidently understood his — thoroughly. This silk, now," continued Mrs. Letheby, "I couldn't get a better in any shop I know of, seven and six a yard at the very least, a good thick silk, and one that doesn't look as if it would cut. I must try to get over to Winstowe before I leave, and get a few yards more to make out a dress."

"Seven and six? dear me!" returned Mrs. Dormer; "it will have cost a good deal in hat-bands and scarfs."

For Mrs. Dormer not being a Dormer by birth, was not imbued with the prejudice that a funeral ought to be got up regardless of expense.

Mrs. Letheby's brow slightly contracted, but she forgave Mrs. Dormer for this want of proper feeling and responded,—

"My dear Jane, at a funeral everything should be of the best; it is a satisfaction to those left, and a compliment to the departed—especially where there is so much wealth as in the present case. Who would ever have thought of poor Lotty's coming in for such a property. She was the last of us married, and she's done the best as far as money is concerned, and as for her husband, if I were in her place I

should consider myself a deal better off without him than with him, and I daresay Lotty will think the same herself when she picks up her spirits a little."

In which sentiments of Mrs. Letheby's, Mrs. Dormer most heartily joined, having been several times frozen at the state dinner-parties by Mr. Carmichael's extreme frigidity, and having felt, as she expressed herself to her husband afterwards, "in that state of shiver that it seemed as if no earthly fire could ever warm her." Therefore the two decided that Aunt Lotty was, on the whole, rather a gainer than a loser by late events.

"And whatever happens," said Mrs. Letheby, oracularly, "whatever happens, she'll always be able to look back with satisfaction, and to feel that no husband, whoever or whatever he might have been, could have had a more comfortable and creditable funeral than hers has had to-day."

But Mrs. Letheby forgot one important point in her calculations, namely, that she and Aunt Lotty were two different persons.

It was the first time that Mrs. Letheby had ever paid a visit to Green Oake, and not being deeply affected by the loss of her brother-in-law, she was quite able to make the best use of her time in taking stock of the premises. She made Joyce act as guide, and examined the house from garret to cellar. She took a mental inventory of the contents of the china-pantry, and of what silver was in use.

"I should like to have seen the whole of it," she said;

“but it would not perhaps be quite delicate to ask Lotty for the key at a time like this.”

So she restrained her curiosity with a half-sigh, and trusted that a future occasion might reveal to her longing eyes the treasures of the plate-chest. She paused at the door of the wine-cellar, but imagination was destined to be her only informant. Yet of course a man like Mr. Carmichael would naturally keep a good stock of wine. It would have been gratifying to have been able unhesitatingly to affirm that the cellar was what a wine-cellar ought to be in the Dormer estimation, but under present circumstances this was impossible.

“You see, Joyce, I shall be asked a good many questions when I go back to Credlington. They’ll all like to hear as much as possible about poor Lotty, and I should like to be able to answer everything correctly. However, I must make the best use of my eyes in seeing what is to be seen; everything depends upon me, for though your Aunt Jane is a very good woman, and I’ve nothing to say against her, still she is not a Dormer, and therefore cannot be expected to have the faculty of seeing things with Dormer eyes.”

What the peculiar advantage of this faculty might be, Joyce could not determine, as it certainly had not helped Aunt Lotty to a very clear-sighted perception of her husband. True, Aunt Lotty might be a degenerate Dormer, as Mrs. Letheby usually spoke of her as poor Lotty.

“It’s a wonder where the will can be,” said Mrs. Letheby.

“There can be no doubt but that he’s made one, though why people should hide away their wills in places where they can’t be found is more than I can make out. You don’t know of any other relatives beside Miss Carmichael, do you, Joyce?”

“No.”

“Ah! then I suppose the property would go to her after poor Lotty’s death.”

“Perhaps so,” returned Joyce.

“Perhaps so!” repeated Mrs. Letheby, “there’s no ‘perhaps’ in the matter, that I can see; of course it will, child, there’s not the shadow of a doubt upon the subject.”

And Joyce made no answer, knowing that Aunt Letheby held the doctrine that the opinion of a Dormer was not to be disputed.

“I don’t much like the girl,” continued Mrs. Letheby; “there’s something too restless and uneasy about her. However, possibly she may be going to have a fever, for I’m sure her manner is very queer and excitable.”

“I hope not,” said Joyce, quickly, with a half fear that Aunt Letheby, being a woman of some experience in illness, might be right. And when they arrived in the drawing-room she managed to escape from Mrs. Letheby, who was deeply absorbed in a minute investigation of the ornaments and furniture.

And a very thorough examination did Mrs. Letheby make, and considerable appraising talent did she develope in her

estimate of the various articles. She uncovered one of the chairs to note the colour and texture of the damask beneath; she lifted up a corner of the handsome tablecloth in order to assure herself that the table was of the best polished rosewood—"and a thousand pities to cover it," she commented.

She had been, as she expressed it, "pricing" cornices only a few days before, therefore she was able to decide that Mr. Carmichael had given no mean price for these, "for I never saw handsomer—did you?" and she looked round in order to appeal to Joyce. But Joyce was gone.

"Ah, well, there's plenty to amuse one, without needing anyone to talk to," reflected Mrs. Letheby; "there's all the old china I've never looked at, nor the bronzes and the chimney ornaments, and I don't know what. And in one's own sister's drawing-room one needn't stand upon ceremony, so I shall take a good look at everything."

Which Mrs. Letheby accordingly did, and which formed the staple of her conversation for some time after her return to Credlington, thereby raising her to an unapproachable height in the estimation of her sister-in-law, who, in the same amount of time, had not been able to collect one-tenth part the amount of information; and Mrs. Dormer meekly attributing the fact to her not being a born Dormer, solaced herself with the consideration that the next best thing to being a Dormer by birth, was to be a Dormer by name.

CHAPTER XIX.

FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY. THE HAUNTING SUSPICION.

THE house is quiet now. Aunt Letheby and Aunt Jane and their husbands have gone away, and Aunt Lotty, Doris, and I are alone.

How desolate a house seems when there has been a death in it. We move quietly about, as though we feared to disturb some one. We speak in low voices, and if we hear a door shut suddenly it makes us start. There is a cloud hanging over us that weighs us down, and we cannot free ourselves from its atmosphere.

I thought all these feelings would have vanished when the funeral was over, and the blinds drawn up, and daylight let in once more—when the house was relieved of the solemn presence of the dead man.

But we cannot shake off the weight that oppresses us, though we wonder that we should feel thus deeply the death of a man we so little liked as Mr. Carmichael—that is, Doris and I wonder, for Aunt Lotty mourns as an affectionate wife would mourn for the best of husbands.

But Aunt Lotty believes him to have been the best of husbands, and if she ever happened to see any faults in him, death has blotted them all out, for death is a great obliterator of failings. As a general rule, we remember more good of our friends after their death than we ever thought of them in their lives; perhaps, also, we have a superstitious reverence for the dead, and care not to speak lightly of them.

Aunt Lotty certainly remembers more good of Mr. Carmichael than ever belonged to him. If either of them was ever to blame, she fears it was herself. She was not good enough for such a man, so full of virtues, so superior in intellect. Poor Aunt Lotty! She has canonised Mr. Carmichael already, and he will for ever reign as a saint in her calendar.

Well, it is best that it should be so, and when time has dried up her tears, and healed her sorrow, she will have pleasant memories to look back upon, none the less pleasant because a loving heart and a kindly imagination have thrown the halo of pardonable fiction around them.

But it is not thus with me. I look back upon Mr. Carmichael's death with a feeling of awe.

My vision was clearer than Aunt Lotty's. She did not understand as I did the struggle of those dying hours. She knew not that her husband had descended to the grave with a heavy load upon his conscience—some wrong committed, that it was past his power to obtain forgiveness for, or

even to reveal. No, Aunt Lotty knew not this, and I fervently pray that she may ever be kept from such knowledge.

Will any of us ever know what this secret is? They say that, deep as some secrets are hidden, yet shall they be made known, even as oftentimes both earth and sea reject the murdered victim, and cast it back at the murderer's feet. However, there seems little chance of this present mystery being cleared up. Mr. Carmichael is dead, and Doris's packet is lost, and what other hope remains of a revelation?

Still one does not know what miracle may happen, for I am almost beginning to believe in miracles. Since I have emerged from the Wonder Age, I have left off wondering, and am gradually drifting into the Age of Faith. At least, I am trying to drift into it and to believe that everything has a deeper significance than appears upon the surface, and that each event we are disposed to look upon as trifling has some well-ordered end. That nothing is small or unimportant, but that everything is best as it happens. I am trying, I say, to believe all this; but faith does not come all at once, though, when it comes in its full development, man may remove mountains; however, until then, it is hard work enough even to clear away a molehill.

I hope Doris is not going to be ill. I found her yesterday lying on the hearth-rug in front of the porch-room fire, with her head resting on the great arm-chair.

“Doris, are you ill?” I asked; and when she lifted up her face I saw that she had been crying.

“I think,” I continued, “that you and I may now change places, and I may tax you with looking wretchedly ill. What ails you?”

“I’m not ill, and yet I am ill,” answered Doris. “I’m sick at heart, Joyce, and very unhappy,” and her face was again hidden.

“Surely you have nothing to distress you. You heard from Mr. Chester yesterday, and——”

“I was not thinking of Gabriel. I am not troubling myself about him. It’s Lynncourt, Joyce. I dare say it’s wrong, but the feeling grows stronger and stronger upon me that I cannot go there. Joyce, I do believe in presentiments; I can’t help it; I have such a strong feeling that there’s something not right in this matter. I don’t know what I think. Sometimes I dare not think; but if I could only stay with Aunt Lotty, or go to Mrs. Howell, I should be so much happier than I shall ever be at Lynncourt.”

“But you will not have long to stay there, Doris,” I said.

She looked up at me with a searching glance.

“Why not?”

“You know why, Doris, as well as I do. It will only be until Mr. Chester returns from the continent.”

“Uncle Carmichael’s death may make a difference. Aunt Lotty will not like a wedding to follow a funeral so soon.”

“I don’t know. I never saw any reason why a marriage need be put off for a death, that is, beyond a few weeks. It can be as quiet as people like to have it, and of course yours will be a very quiet wedding, Doris.”

“I have few friends to invite to it, certainly, Joyce; but the wedding may be put off for other reasons.”

“Doris! And is that what is fretting you?”

“No,” returned Doris, sharply. “I told you that it was Lynncourt that troubled me, Joyce,” she continued, suddenly springing up and standing before me. “I’ve had strange thoughts lately, waking dreams that seem so real, dark shadows that fall across the little light that’s shining upon me now. I feel as if I belonged to no one, as if I had no place, no home; as if I wanted to go forth into the world, and wander about until I had found a quiet resting-place for myself, and had forgotten all about Green Oake and Lynncourt, and could remember only the happy days when I was poor and with my mother. Joyce, I can’t help it, and I’m sorry to speak ill of the dead; but I believe that Uncle Carmichael has gone to the grave with a lie on his soul.”

I was startled by her energy. Besides, what had put this thought into her head, for I had not told her of Mr. Carmichael’s last moments.

“Doris, Doris, be calm; don’t speak so loud, Aunt Lotty might hear you.”

She lowered her voice.

“Joyce,” she went on in a subdued tone, “do you think that there was anything on his mind when he died? You were in the room, you saw him. I know he could not speak, but was there no sign by which you could judge?”

What did I know? How could I answer? Like herself I had suspicions, but my suspicions even yet were so vague that I dare not form them into words; yet still that one unproved and haunting theory was at work within me, and involuntarily the hidden thoughts of my mind burst forth,—

“I wonder if he tampered with your mother’s packet?”

“When?”

“The day your key was lost.”

Doris grasped my arm, she looked eagerly into my face.

“And you never said a word of this thought of yours to me!” said she, reproachfully.

“I did not dare to breathe such an accusation on such slight grounds. I had no evidence, I had only an intuition to go upon.”

“And now——”

“Mr. Carmichael’s death-bed makes me feel convinced that I was right. There was something upon his mind,

Doris, something that he strove to reveal when it was too late; and that something was connected with your mother's packet."

Doris sat still for a few minutes, very still; she held my arm with so tight a clasp that it was painful, but I did not move. Presently she loosed her fingers and rocked herself backward and forward, every now and then uttering a low moan like to some dumb animal in pain. At last she spoke, and her voice was forced and unnatural.

"Joyce, is it possible, do you think it possible, that my mother, that Ellen Carmichael was *not* my mother?"

I gave an irrepressible cry, the haunting suspicion born of the unproved theory was at length clothed in words, and stood out clear before me. Yet how could I bear to dash to the ground the fond belief of a lifetime? I could not speak. But Doris, seizing both my hands, implored me that I would be truthful with her. That I would tell her if such a thought had ever crossed my mind. And I, with my arm round the poor trembling child, in broken accents answered,

"I have thought so, Doris."

"My mother, oh, my mother!" sobbed Doris.

And then in a low, sad voice she quoted this passage from the poor wife's story,—

"Two living women and two living babes were in the boat

at night, but the dawn saw only one living mother, one living child—the other two had perished.”

“One mother and one child were saved,” said Doris, “but we are not told which. Oh, Joyce, Joyce, I see it all. How wicked, how cruel of uncle—no, thank heaven, he is not my uncle, I am no niece of his—. And yet *she* was his sister; my only mother; my blessed, angelic mother; the only mother I ever knew; no mother could have been tenderer to me. Oh! Joyce, I see it all.”

And so did I, and seeing, wondered I had not known it all along. It was wonderful how the scales had at once fallen from my eyes, and I was blind no longer. A hundred trivial circumstances I had not heeded or had overlooked rose up before me, and now the overwhelming certainty seemed stronger than ever the doubt had been. I marvelled why I had not understood it all before; why I had hesitated to speak to Mr. Chester, even why I had not said to Mr. Carmichael upon his death-bed, “Doris is not your sister’s daughter.” And yet I had not shaped my thought clearly even then. It had come suddenly, now this moment, like a flash of lightning from a dark cloud that had been hovering on my horizon for many a day. So clear a revelation now, that I wondered why it had ever been hidden from me.

Yet why should I thus reproach myself,—conviction does not force itself upon the mind all at once; there are many phases to go through ere one arrive at the truth, and until

one has viewed a matter thoroughly in all its bearings, it is impossible to form an impartial decision. When one only half knows, or half suspects, everything is so vague, so dim, that it is useless to reason calmly, or to form any kind of judgment; one must wait until the whole lies mapped out before one, and one point can be set against another, one circumstance weighed with another, and facts and reason brought to bear, where only suspicion and doubtful evidence existed before. Therefore I need not reproach myself; had it not been for that death-bed struggle, I might even now have had only dim surmisings instead of being in undoubting knowledge of the truth. For truth both Doris and I felt it to be, though we saw no means of ever proving it.

Very plain it now appeared to us that, on that morning in August, only a few months ago—and yet that seems so very far back now—Mr. Carmichael had, in some way, obtained possession of Doris's key, and had, during our absence, mutilated and arranged the contents of the packet in the manner that suited his purposes. We understood now the blots, the erasures, the torn sheets, the seeming omissions, and I remembered the two kinds of wax with which the seal was evidently made.

“Joyce, we can do nothing without Gabriel; he must come back.”

I felt as Doris did, he was the person to consult; better even than Mr. Lynn, under the circumstances.

And poor Aunt Lotty! What a grief to her to know of

her husband's guilt. But she must never know it. Surely Mr. Chester can help us in some way to keep the secret, or poor Aunt Lotty's gentle heart will be broken, and her recollections of the past will be marred. Heaven grant that she may be spared the shattering of her idol, unworthy though he be.

I am not one of those stern iconoclasts who, for the sake of what they call candid speaking, and letting people know the whole truth, would deface an image in some weaker heart because loving fingers have chiselled it with too flattering a touch.

Aunt Lotty moves about the house quietly, looking very gentle and very sad in her black dress and widow's cap. Her tiny ringlets are brushed smoothly back, and her face looks none the worse for being a little paler. Poor Aunt Lotty, she believes herself to have suffered an irreparable loss. When she has got over her first grief, she will put up a monument in Craythorpe Church, setting forth the virtues of Hugh Carmichael, Esq. I almost think she is looking out appropriate texts now, for I see her making notes from her Bible, and it was open for a long time at the first psalm.

Oh, dear! What are inscriptions on tombstones worth? When I die I shall leave a request that on my headstone may be written no other words than these: "Here lies Joyce Dormer."

CHAPTER XX.

THE PACKET FOUND.

MR. CHESTER was again in Rome,—in the wonderful city; the queen city; before whom all other cities must bow down, even in these later days, despite their high pretensions; for the past has cast a royal mantle over her, such as no other city shall ever boast; it was ages in weaving, and it will be ages ere it shall wear out, and to its last thread it will show a texture that can never be imitated, for the loom in which it was wrought is broken, and it is past the power of human skill to mend it.

There is in inanimate things a sort of social scale: aristocrat and plebeian being as clearly stamped on the stones of cities as on the brows of men.

Prosperity has little or nothing to do with it. Miles and miles of added streets, thousands and thousands of well-built houses, men and women in comfortable garments, fail to give a town the interest that a single ruin will often create. And how is this?

“Manifestly wrong,” appears to be the answer; “for in the welfare of humanity should lie the strength of human sympathy.” And so it may be; but, deep down in the hearts

of most men there lies something, they know not what — reverence for the past, conservatism, enthusiasm, superstition, call it what you will—that gives to the ruin round which the interest of tradition is thrown, a higher place in their estimation than they would accord to the most costly edifice whose uprearing has been accomplished before their own eyes.

Mr. Chester was in his studio, working at the painting whose completion was to send him back to England.

It was a brilliant picture, the deep blue of the sky was almost lost in the rich gold and crimson tints of sunset. The pillars of a portico stood dark and clear against the gorgeous mass of colouring. Upon the worn and broken steps a group of beggar children played, their dark locks seemingly fringed with a golden halo; whilst at a little distance stood two Carmelite monks, whose white garments assumed a grey tinge as they contrasted with the vivid glow that illumined the background.

Mr. Chester stepped back a few paces to contemplate his work, but he was not satisfied. His hand had moved mechanically, but there was no spirit or force in the last touches. He was doing more harm than good. He was not in the humour for painting. He threw his brush aside and flung himself into a seat. He remembered that journey into Essex, and how he had longed to be at Rome once more, away from every one. Yet now that he had returned he felt restless and almost discontented. "The lines," had not

fallen as he wished—places were not pleasant to him—
“Glorious Rome,” was beginning to lose her fascination.

Glorious! Were these the days of Rome’s glory? What meant those foreign soldiers in the streets? Wherefore the poverty, oppression, and misery that were rife on every side? Time, too, had not spared the proud city; triumphal arches were broken, temples in ruins, palaces and hovels standing side by side. And yet, despite short-comings, despite her fall from those days when she sat enthroned upon the seven hills, with the imperial purple flung around her, still she was a queen,—a ghostly queen, whose court is among the dead that by their greatness still are living, their deeds being immortal. Never shall other city claim such a past, or wrest that heritage from her. Neither shall city ever rise to be her rival, for splendid as the results of man’s genius may be in the present, he cannot create a past.

And as Mr. Chester thus mused, a wondrous panorama whirled before him. As Rome’s first king he watched the eagles wing their flight, he saw the city rise that fairer and fairer grew as time sped on, that gathered within its walls the strength of heroic hearts and valiant hands, the tribe of iron Romans. And then another age arose, the age of luxury—and prouder, and more beautiful than ever in her costly garments, sat the dazzling queen. Her sceptre stretched to the east, to the west, southward, and northward, and Rome was mistress of the world. He saw the arches raised, the victors crowned. He heard the echo of the

silvery tongues whose eloquence the world still reverences. He recognised the genius that has left its trace, and still holds in thraldom the thoughtful traveller, who, as he steps lightly over rare inlaid floors, raises his eyes in almost adoration to the inspired efforts of the mighty artist minds. Each stone of Rome is still precious as a priceless jewel, and through the broken archways and the ruined Forum a never-tiring voice murmurs a ceaseless song, whose burden is "Rome is eternal."

And yet Rome was beginning to lose the charm she had exercised over Mr. Chester. The siren-song had failed to lull him to repose as he had trusted it would. He had been in a restless, fevered state ever since his return. What had he done, how fixed his fate, so that no hand could unmake the life he had planned out for himself?

The same feeling of treachery to Doris that had struck upon Joyce, smote upon him also. And Doris was to be his wife. Why had he acted so hastily? Did he repent? Supposing after all that Joyce——

Pshaw! Of what was he dreaming? He and Doris would be very happy together, and would soon forget Green Oake, and—no, he should never forget; he wished himself at the antipodes, anywhere, and he restlessly paced the apartment. There was a gentle knock at the door, and a little Italian boy, whose face, beautiful as one of Raffaello's cherubs, had won him the place of errand-runner and nondescript-attendant to Mr. Chester, entered.

“A very large letter for the signore.”

“It *is* a very large one, Antonio,” replied his master, glancing at it mechanically; “leave it on the table.”

The boy did as he was bidden and then left the room, and Mr. Chester still paced up and down. He was in no hurry to read the letter, for, in his mechanical glance, he had perceived that it was not from England, and he therefore felt no curiosity about it.

He was still absorbed in his reverie, and yet it caused him more pain than pleasure. He was battling with himself, and striving to reason himself into that philosophic state of mind that decides that “everything happens for the best.”

It is the would-be consolatory theory of the greater part of the world, to judge by the continual repetition of the proposition, but it fails to carry all the comfort with it that it is designed to give. For when the “everything” has gone wrong, it is beyond the power of humanity to take up the proposition as a creed, and to say, “I believe it to be right,” with whole heart and soul.

One has to let the edge of grief, indignation, disappointment, mortification, or whatever the adverse “everything” may have called forth, wear itself away ere one can in any way derive from the trite saying the smallest particle of consolation; and even then men rather settle down to a sort of discontented acquiescence in the turn matters have taken, through another philosophy that teaches that “what is done cannot be undone.”

In time Mr. Chester's reverie came to an end, and his return to this everyday world brought with it an impulse to open "the very large letter" that had been lying so long unheeded. It was from a friend with whom he had met on his journey to England, and with whom he had travelled for nearly two days. What could he possibly have to say that involved such a bulk of correspondence? Mr. Chester leisurely broke the seal. Then he started and uttered an exclamation of surprise. For the parcel contained a very short note from his friend, accompanied by Doris's packet!

"Don't think me a thief," wrote his friend, "for I have not the slightest knowledge of how the enclosed came into my possession. All I can tell you is, that I found it a few days since amongst some papers that I had with me when you and I last met, and in some unaccountable manner your letter was, I suppose, spirited off amongst them into my portmanteau. I trust that its temporary loss has been of no great importance. I am inclined to believe that it cannot have been, as the letter, from its outward appearance, bears the marks of having been kept by you for some time."

So Doris's packet was found. Mr. Chester had something to occupy him now, he must at once despatch it, and this involved writing a letter. He was rather glad to be obliged to write a letter, for he could not help acknowledging to himself that he had not written to Doris quite as

often as, under the circumstances, he might have done, but he had excused himself on the ground that he and Doris understood each other so well that a very vigorous correspondence was unnecessary. Nevertheless, conscience had not been altogether satisfied with this argument, and it was with a more hopeful feeling than he had lately indulged in, and with some gratitude to his friend, that he now sat down and wrote a long letter to Doris.

Now that the packet was found, he wondered that this chance of finding it had never occurred to him. It almost seemed to him as if he could remember the very moment at which it must have been transferred to his friend's papers. And he also distinctly recollected having seen the letter on the evening that he and his friend had been together, but he had until this moment entirely forgotten the circumstance. It was strange. How could he have forgotten it? Why had he not remembered it? Why? He was almost tempted to answer as Joyce would probably have done, "because it was otherwise written in the book of destiny." That wonderful book about whose paragraphs none can come to a conclusion, because it is written in an unknown language and with an invisible pen. Sometime, perchance, we may learn to read it, but the time has not yet come.

However, Doris's packet was found: he was glad of that; it seemed as though a weight were removed from him which he had scarcely felt until the moment of its removal.

How would its finding affect Doris? How affect Mr. Carmichael! To the first question alone would there be an answer, for Mr. Carmichael was lying stiff and cold. His lips would never move again to speak truth or falsehood, his eyes would never uncloze again to look upon this world, wherein he had woven his tangled web. Good and evil were alike to him now. He was dead, and the world went on without him. A higher hand had held the secret that living he strove to keep, and dying he strove to reveal, and now it would be divulged and he should have no part in its unravelling.

There was news upon the road that Mr. Chester little anticipated.

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY—"DARK MADE LIGHT."

I SAID that I was beginning to believe in miracles, though why people should account one thing a miracle more than another, perhaps even if I went deeper into the matter I could not determine. For if we sit down and consider the wonders and mysteries with which we are surrounded, everything is so wonderful that we are apt to get bewildered, and in our bewilderment to fall back on the old saying of "wonders will never cease," as a sort of half-explanation of the fact that wonders are still in existence, and we feel that there is much wisdom and truth in the old saying and in old sayings generally; and we are grateful to the person who first made the remark, that afterwards passed into a proverb; though, for the matter of that, I think that all proverbs must have had a great many ancestors.

There, if I do not pause, I shall get into one of my dissertations; it is such a temptation when one is sitting pen in hand just to note down one's thoughts. But I must forbear, as I have a long episode to weave into my story to-night, and I have to write a short preface to explain how it

happens that I have it to tell. After our conversation the other day, Doris wrote to Mr. Chester, but there has not been time for an answer to her letter yet, though a wonderful answer has come.

This morning Mr. Lynn sent up a large packet addressed to Doris, in Mr. Chester's hand, and when she opened it what should it contain but her mother's lost letter. Mr. Chester had found it or rather had recovered it; it having been in the possession of a friend with whom he met and travelled part way on his journey to England. In some way the letter got amongst the papers of this friend, and was accidentally packed away in his portmanteau, and Mr. Chester received it from him on the very day of Mr. Carmichael's death.

It was an odd coincidence, and I am almost inclined to go off into a disquisition on something verging on spiritualism. But that would lead me too far astray. So I return to my subject. I was in the drawing-room, running my fingers very softly over the piano. I did not like to strike the notes loud lest Aunt Lotty, wandering about the house, might hear them, and they might jar upon her. But I was not destined to play long without interruption. Doris, with tears streaming down her cheeks, rushed excitedly into the room.

"It is found, Joyce, it is found;—everything will be made clear; you must come with me and read it. And she closed the piano and hurried me away upstairs.

“What is found?” said I.

“The packet—my mother’s packet. Take it, Joyce, and read it to me. I can’t read it, the letters are all swimming before me and I can’t see a word.”

No wonder she could not see, for her tears blinded her, and mine blinded me many times before I had finished reading the letter. I took it from her, and read as follows:—

MY BELOVED DORIS,—Only for your own sake would I put down on paper what I have kept secret so many years. As long as I was with you there was no need to reveal it, and I believed it for your happiness not to do so. But I look forward to a time when I shall have left you, and my Doris will be alone in the world. Then it may happen that the information I am about to give you may prove useful and for your interest.

Doris, it almost breaks my heart to tell you; it seems like severing the tie that has been so sacred between us, and yet I could not have loved you better than I have done, had you been my own child. For Doris, my darling, you are not my daughter, you are not my own child.

You have often heard me speak of that fearful night when the Albatross went down, and of the little boat wherein two helpless women and their babes were launched upon the wild, desolate ocean. One was a young French lady with her child, about the age of my own.

It was an awful night; the waves roared around us; we were tossed hither and thither, but we clung to the boat, and gradually the waters calmed, though they still heaved mightily.

We scarcely spoke to one another, though now and then, to break the monotony of the sullen roar of the subsiding waters, I whispered a word of comfort to the Frenchwoman, and she answered me back.

She held her baby tight in one arm, the little creature clinging to her mother's neck. Mine was fast clasped to my breast, with my shawl folded round it, to shield it from the piercing cold, for it was but a delicate creature: and, in silence, we still held on to the boat, for though the wind had abated, the sea swell was very heavy.

After a while, I spoke again to the French lady; I only said one word,—“Courage.” She did not answer me immediately, but at length, in a low, gasping tone, she said,—

“*Mon enfant! O mon Dieu! Mon enfant!*”

I bent forward.

“Is the child dead?”

And then the little thing began to cry, a healthy, lusty cry, and so I knew that it was all right. And the mother hushed it feebly to rest, and it slept again. Then once more she spoke to me, this time grasping my hand, so feebly, oh so feebly! and she said,—

“*Mon enfant! O mon Dieu! Mon enfant!*”

And she never spoke again; the night was too dark for

me to see her. And again there was silence. My own child never cried, it slept peacefully. I wrapt the shawl closer round it, for it seemed cold, and then I loosened the skirt of my dress and folded that around it too. I did not mind the wind and cold myself, so that my little Doris, my delicate one, could be saved from suffering.

Darker and darker grew the night, the morn was approaching, and the darkest hour comes just before the dawning. Ah! it was lighter, far lighter to me than the brightest mornings for I clasped my living baby to my heart. But when the sun rose, my little child was dead. The pitiless storm had beaten down my flower; it was too fragile to bear exposure to the cold. My child was dead, my little Doris. I tried to think that she was but asleep: I spoke to her, I kissed her, I stroked the flaxen hair away, for the round shining ringlets had fallen over the brow. I tried to warm her hands and feet, but it was all in vain,—my little child was dead! So was the poor French lady. She had burst a blood-vessel in the night, and when I heard her moaning over her child she knew that she was dying. And the sorrowful cry sounded in my ears, "*Mon enfant! O mon Dieu! Mon enfant!*" The mother had surely meant it as an appeal to me when with her feeble fingers she had clasped my hand.

Her head was resting on the side of the boat, and the child was still clinging to her neck. Could it be also dead? I gently laid my baby down, very gently, for I could not believe that it would never smile on me again.

And then I lifted up the other child. Its clothes were stained with its mother's blood. I unclasped its hands from the dead mother's neck and took it in my arms, and pressed it close to me to keep it warm: and then I sat down, overcome with grief and horror. In one arm I tenderly held my own dead child, and in the other the still sleeping orphan. And at my feet lay the poor dead mother. I covered her face with a handkerchief, and crossed her waxen hands upon her breast.

And the sun rose higher and higher; the sky was blue and clear, and not a cloud floated over it. And there I sat alone — alone, with not a living soul to speak to, with not a living creature near me save the poor Frenchwoman's sleeping babe.

I could not weep, my tears seemed all dried up; I felt no fear, I felt a dreadful calm; I knew I must wait patiently until I grew fainter and fainter and Death in mercy should stretch out his arms to receive me. I had no hope, and yet I had no fear.

I sat gazing dreamily around, not noticing, not thinking of anything; I was, as it were, in a trance. And suddenly a white speck appeared on the horizon, growing ever larger and larger. It was a vessel that slowly and steadily made towards me; but still in my dream I never thought of it as a means of rescuing me from my perilous situation. Motionless I sat, with the dead and the living child on my knees; and the boat drifted hither and thither.

Nearer the vessel came, I could see the sailors in the rigging now. Presently I heard a shout, but I still sat in my trance, not heeding, not stirring. And the vessel came nearer now! men were unloosing a boat, then it was lowered and oars were plashing through the water. The sailors were foreign; I could not tell whether Spanish or Portuguese, as I did not understand the language. They would have taken me into their boat, but I pointed to the dead woman and shook my head.

They were evidently at a loss how to act, but after some conference they fastened a rope to the boat and towed it to the vessel.

There was a French priest on board, who spoke a little broken English, and I made him comprehend that I could not leave the bodies unburied, and I prayed him to use his influence that they might be decently committed to the sea. Nothing would induce the captain to take the bodies on board, but they might be fastened up in a shroud, and the priest might say a prayer over them.

I kissed my dead baby over and over again, and placed it in the dead mother's arms. I wiped away the stains of blood from her face; and kissing her, I made a vow that I would be as a mother to her child.

So they were buried in the ocean; thy dead mother, Doris, and my dead babe. The priest said a prayer over them, and with a heavy splash they descended into the bosom of the deep. Then I woke up, for I had been in my trance till then;

that splash had waked me up. I gave a shriek, I tried to spring into the water after them. My child, my little Doris! Gone, gone, and I was quite alone now. One kindly woman held me back, and another took you gently and tended you; and I fell down insensible, and there was a long dark interval, wherein I remembered nothing.

When I recovered my senses I was lying on a sofa in the cabin, and at first I thought I was on board the Albatross. And they put you into my arms, and as I looked upon you and knew that you were not my own Doris, it all came back to me, and I recalled that awful night on the waters, and the death of my little child, and a sob that almost choked me rose in my throat; I shrieked with the pain of it, it seemed as if it would rend my heart, and I should suffocate. And then a burst of tears came, and I wept on and on until I could weep no longer, and with those tears I christened you anew, and called you Doris after my lost babe.

Your mother and my babe went down to their deep resting-place together, and as I pressed the living baby to my heart I vowed that unto death I would be as a mother to you, and that you should never feel the loss of her who died at sea. I know not if I did right, my darling; but we two were all in all to one another, and none could have guarded you more faithfully than I have done.

* * * * *

And now that I have revealed this secret to you, I desire you, in case of any trouble, to take this letter to John Gres-

ford Lynn, of Lynncourt, and for my sake he will treat you as a daughter. Doris, he is my husband; he believes that I was drowned when the Albatross was lost on its homeward passage; and I have only lately known that he is still alive, for I believed him to have died a cruel death before I left Australia.

* * * * *

I shall give this to Gabriel Chester, who will take care of it, in case any accident should happen to the packet I intend to place in your hands. I can tell you nothing of your own mother, save that her name was De Ligny, and she was a widow.

* * * * *

I longed to see Doris's face, but it was hidden. I wondered how she would bear the information contained in the letter.

She was crying very quietly and did not lift up her face, but she said, "I shall always call her my mother, Joyce."

Then she was silent again. Presently she raised her head. "Joyce," she said, "I am very glad to know all this. It makes me independent."

I wondered what she meant, for it sounded somewhat enigmatical.

"I would rather be alone in the world and belonging to no one, and able to shape my own course."

Had she forgotten Mr. Chester? Of what was she thinking? I was half inclined to ask her, but I scarcely knew

how to do so. She seemed to perceive what was passing in my mind, for she said, "You are thinking of Gabriel."

"Yes, I was."

"I have been thinking of him too, a great deal more seriously of late than I have ever done before; but I think that he and I can arrange matters to our satisfaction."

"Of cour se you can, Doris," I answered, somewhat energetically, for I feared she had misunderstood me; "this will not make the slightest difference to Mr. Chester. Why should it?"

"I am not Mr. Lynn's daughter now; I shall have no fortune," said Doris demurely.

"Doris!" I exclaimed; "as if Mr. Chester would care for that. You don't in your heart believe such a thing of him."

"You don't evidently," she answered; "you are beginning to appreciate him at last. Take care that I am not jealous, Joyce."

Jealous! Doris jealous of me! That I knew she would never be; but, somehow, her words sank into my heart and humbled me; for though I knew that they were spoken at random, they made me feel more keenly than ever how lightly Mr. Chester esteemed me by the side of Doris. Jealous! Ah no! The jealousy, if it existed, should be on my side. But I look into my heart as I sit here writing, and I am thankful that I can say with truth that no jealousy of

Doris holds a place therein. I have kept my love free from such a taint, and I trust I shall do so unto the end. Jealousy is too contemptible for even poor Joyce Dormer to think of.

What I need is patience, most excellent of Christian graces. Not stoic indifference, not sluggish apathy, but that brave, gentle virtue that helps us to conquer life when all is dark and antagonistic around us.

Doubtless he is a great man who can command an army, but truly I think he is a greater who doth possess his soul in patience.

CHAPTER XXII.

DORIS ASKS A QUESTION.

"LETTERS," said Aunt Lotty; "and one for you, Doris, with a foreign postmark."

And Doris, taking her letter, read it eagerly.

"Gabriel is coming, Aunt Lotty," said she; "he will be here in a day or two; perhaps to-morrow."

The first gleam of pleasure that had shown itself on Aunt Lotty's countenance since her husband's death beamed upon it now as she answered, "How kind, how thoughtful of him to come to us in our trouble. Ah, if he could but have been here to see poor dear Mr. Carmichael before he died! But that was not to be, or it would have been, and it's a great comfort to me, dear, that he's coming now; I shall have some one to talk to about business matters, and to advise me, and as he is going to be my nephew, I shall feel quite at home with him. There's something so friendly about Mr. Chester. To be sure, Mr. Lynn's willing to do everything, and he's very kind; but then he has his own troubles, poor man, and heavy enough they are. And though he's your father, Doris, I can't help saying that he's not like Mr. Chester."

Joyce caught Doris's eye glancing at her, and she knew that Doris, like herself, was wondering how matters could ever be explained to Aunt Lotty, so that she should have no misgivings as to her husband's conduct.

To Joyce it appeared simply impossible.

But, when Mr. Chester came he did so manage affairs that Aunt Lotty remained in blissful ignorance of Mr. Carmichael's manifold transgressions. For Mr. Chester made no explanations, and Aunt Lotty, following the habit she had fallen into during Mr. Carmichael's lifetime, asked no questions. When Mr. Chester stated that the lost letter was found, and that from it they ascertained that Doris was not the daughter of Ellen Carmichael, but of the poor French lady who was lost at sea, she heard him patiently to the end, accepted the information as it stood, and made her own comments.

"I think," she said, "that poor dear Mr. Carmichael must have had some suspicion of this, and that was the reason he was so anxious about Doris's letter. But, of course, he would not like to breathe such a thing; it would have been so cruel to Mr. Lynn to cast a shadow of doubt upon his happiness. Mr. Carmichael was always so considerate, so thoughtful."

And Aunt Lotty was satisfied; and it never entered into her heart to imagine evil. It never had entered into her heart during her husband's lifetime, and now death had rendered such imagination more than ever impossible.

Oh, kindly veil, that death had thrown over the dead man's sins! Oh, simple, loving heart, that thinketh no evil. The world is better for such hearts, despite their exceeding simpleness. There is something touching — something almost sublime in their credulity, that makes the wisdom of wiser people bow down and take a second place in their presence.

The sequel to the story was no surprise to Mr. Chester; he had from the first suspected that all was not as Mr. Carmichael had represented it to be; though why or wherefore it was not so he would have been at a loss to determine. To break the intelligence to Mr. Lynn would, he felt, be a much more difficult and painful task than he had had with Aunt Lotty; and, to tell the truth, he rather shrank from it. A man does not care to witness the emotion of another, to see him betray his weakness; it is, as it were, a reflection of himself that it hurts his pride to look upon. Wherefore Mr. Chester became cowardly, and spoke to Doris as follows:—

“Would not this explanation come better from Miss Dormer than from any one else? She and Mr. Lynn were together when Mr. Carmichael died, and it would be so natural for her to explain to him the meaning of Mr. Carmichael's distress, the burden that he had upon his mind. And then it would come lighter from a woman's hand than from mine. I have no sympathy for this dead man, I don't profess to have any; but he is the husband of her aunt, and

she can state the case better than I could. Do you think she would undertake it?"

"I am sure she would," replied Doris, "if you really wish it. Joyce is the best person you know, if you would only confess it. As for faults—"

"Miss Dormer's faults—" began Mr. Chester, but Doris interrupted him.

"I don't wish to hear you descant upon them. I don't care for people altogether without failings; they're not so lovable. Faults make people more perfect, Gabriel."

Mr. Chester laughed.

"You are incomprehensible, Doris. Do you mean that a person with faults is more perfect than a person without?"

"It is one of those theories, Gabriel, that you will not understand."

"Cannot—Is it not?"

"I don't know. What I mean is this, that virtues become more perfect if they have something to strive against. The noblest natures are those that overcome the greatest imperfections."

"Then it is well for the character to have great faults in order to become perfect by exercising virtue. What do you say to most vices being merely degenerate virtues, and virtues but elevated vices,—firmness and obstinacy, carefulness and avarice, amiability and indolence, patience and apathy?"

“You can’t make much of a list, Gabriel. No; I don’t believe in anything of the sort; but when I began to talk about Joyce, I was not thinking of any of these things. There was a question I wanted to ask you.”

“Well, what is it?”

“Do you like me well enough to answer an honest question?”

“Doris?”

She drew nearer to him, and put her hand on his shoulder, looking straight into his eyes.

“What is this very serious and important question?” he said, taking her other hand in his, and looking up into the beautiful eyes that were fixed upon him.

She did not hesitate—she spoke very quietly and steadily:—

“Gabriel, why did you ask me to marry you, when you liked Joyce better?”

Mr. Chester sprang from his seat and stood before her,—

“What makes you ask such a question, Doris?” he demanded, almost sternly.

“That I may have an answer,” she returned, steadfastly gazing up at him. “Is it such a very difficult question to reply to? Perhaps I can help you, if you will listen to me. Do you remember the night before you went away, that I was sitting looking into the fire, and I told you that I was

making a story, and that I was farther advanced in it than was Joyce in hers, for of mine I knew the ending? I was sitting with my eyes half-closed, but I could see for all that, and I was shaping indistinct thoughts and memories into firm convictions, and as one light flashed upon me after another I wondered that it had been so long darkness with me. I laughed to myself to think how blind every one else was, for now that the bandage was removed I could see so very plainly: I saw how you and Joyce had been misunderstanding and fretting one another; and I knew that you cared for Joyce."

Mr. Chester started; he had seated himself again, and Doris was sitting on a footstool at his feet, as she used to do in those olden days so far away, when he was her teacher and guide, and she a little child. But she was older now and graver, and she felt able to teach the strong man and to help him with her counsel — with her woman's clearer intuitions. And she went on,—

"I saw that you cared for Joyce. Hush! you must hear me to the end," she said, for Mr. Chester made a movement as if to stop her words; "you believed that your love was hopeless. And then I was in trouble, and you thought to help me out of it by giving what love you had to give to little Doris, and you and I both hoped we should be happy. You said you had no one in the world to care for you but me."

"Doris, my darling," said Mr. Chester, stroking back her

hair, "what has put all these strange thoughts into your head to-night?"

But she looked up reproachfully.

"You must be true, Gabriel; you must not try to deceive me. Let me go on with what I read in the fire that night. I further read that you and I had both been wrong; that you, with another love in your heart, should not have asked for mine, and that I with no love in mine, should not have promised to be your wife. For, Gabriel, although I love you very much, it is not the love I ought to give, and neither of us would be satisfied. Therefore I wish our engagement to be at an end."

Mr. Chester looked at her wonderingly.

"Is it my little Doris who tells me she dees not love me?"

"I love you too well, Gabriel, to do what is neither for your happiness nor for mine. I have had a wish all along that you and Joyce should marry, and that I should come and be with you both. I cannot tell you Joyce's secrets, because she has not told them to me. But I read in the fire that both she and you were mistaken in each other. It may be true, and it may not be; but, Gabriel, promise me that you will try to find out."

"Doris——" began Mr. Chester.

"No," she replied; "I will hear nothing that you have to say. Nothing will change my mind. We two are not suited for one another, and I have broken off my engagement."

Will it break your heart?" she added, laughingly, but the tears were in her eyes.

Not sorrowful tears, but tears that would come, she knew not why, making her heart feel lighter and happier than it had done for many a day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY.—MR. LYNN HEARS THE TRUTH.

SINCE Mr. Chester has been here I have had a great deal of time to myself, and have spent it, as usual, in the little porch-room. I have leisure now, after the strange, wild tumult in which the last few weeks have been lived through, to sit down quietly, and take a retrospective view of affairs, and to determine what shall be my future. Aunt Lotty says I must stay with her, and we must live out our quiet Dormer lives together.

After a storm comes a calm. So says the proverb, and so nature teaches us; and truly there has come a lull to this house after the late exciting events and troublous experiences through which we have passed. Some call life a lottery, and speak of Fortune's wheel turning up blanks for some, and prizes for others. It may be a good simile, but I have ever preferred likening life to a game at backgammon, the board being placed before one, and free-will and destiny together working out the problem of success.

Skill is our own, to wield as best we may; but throws are

for us or against us, as the case may be, and skill will not entirely overcome them. And so it seems to me that in life, our power, our genius, call it what we will, commands our destinies to a certain extent; yet ever against this power or genius, time, chance, and circumstance over which we have no control, are being shaken in the dice-box, and we cannot calculate what they may turn out. Perhaps, like the immortal Vicar, we find, if we only want a "quatre," that we "throw a deuce-ace five times running."

I have always felt, when any matter has been brought to a conclusion, that I have made a point in my table, and that there it would remain, waiting the end of the game to be thrown off.

Many points have been made during the last few weeks. The dice have determined them without much effort on my own part; and now I sit dreamily, with an imaginary dice-box in my hand, wondering what throw will come out next. Four and two is the ordinary Dormer luck.

So I sit, half thinking over the late throws, and half calculating the future, trying to bring both together, and so to equalise and realize them. For I feel that I have made a step forward, and am fast advancing towards the Age of Faith.

I have seen the past slip away, and become as a dream—as a beautiful story that, once told, lives for ever in the memory, and has its influence, inasmuch as it cannot be forgotten. One smiles as one looks back upon the strange

jumble that makes the antecedent of many a life, such as I know mine is destined to be; for what can be more natural and Dormer-like than that Aunt Lotty and I should live in peace and prosperity all our days at Green Oake? Just like the ending of a little moral story-book.

Yes, reality is coming upon me, and the Age of Faith, for which I am not wholly unprepared, despite Aunt Letheby's railings against my father for allowing me to cram "heaps upon heaps of rubbish," as she termed it, into my brain.

Oh! those heaps upon heaps, how thankful I am for them now! I don't believe in keeping children from feeding amongst such rare pasturage as I fed in. They gain in those tender years what can never be gained afterwards—a living, loving faith in literature; they realize it without understanding it; they figuratively clasp the author's hand in theirs, firmly believing every word he tells them; and that his characters are real and not mythical. "Founded on fact" is a phrase they utterly ignore. Fact, and nothing but fact, is their belief. Then, again, children never think of authors as dead; they are ever alive to them, speaking to them through their own stories. I never thought Goldsmith as dead. I believed the odd, kindly genius to be still wandering about, and able to give the latest information of the Primrose family, with whom I was on intimate terms, feeling as though I had been present at the green spectacle bargain, and had munched ginger-bread with the "chubby rogues" on Mr. Burchell's knees. And secretly in my heart

I was always sorry that Olivia had not married the baronet, though I have since come to see that Goldsmith managed it better than I should have done. Shakspeare and his friends — Swift with Stella and Vanessa — Cowper in his scarlet mantle being drawn to school, were still in a certain sense living presences. And moving in the same orbit shone out Gil Blas, in his doublet and short cloak and rapier, and all the donnas of the story, and Scipio, Diego, the old negro, the robbers, and the alguazils took their places as actual living beings. And from Gil Blas, and the robbers' cave, and the ruby of the Philippine Islands, it was easy to journey back to older times (though they were no older to me, for I had but one cycle, and peopled it indiscriminately); and then I saw by moonlight the fair Alhambra palace, made ever more real in that I had touched a carven morsel of it that had been sent from Spain. And then Moors, Spaniards, and Isabella faded away, and left me deep in the "Arabian Nights." And then I wept over the story of La Roche, or found myself at the theatre with Evelina and her vulgar relatives, and saw the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, Congreve, Colman, Otway, Cibber, and a host of others played out before me. Buonaparte was one of my heroes then, and I held Corporal Trim in no light estimation.

All these, and many others of a like character filled their niches in my Wonder Age, and stepping down, performed many a masque for my edification. Such masques as only such a childhood can conjure up. Such pictures as such a

childhood only can look back upon, for older hands would fail in harmonising the motley colours. Gorgeous in all their brilliant tints, rich in the fairest lights and darkest shades; storm, sunshine, green pastures, and peaceful rivers all blent in one wonderful landscape that is of earth and yet has lost its earthliness. Or it all comes before me now like some prize essay from the pen of an admirable Crichton, taking in the genius of the writers of the past, and weaving strength, beauty, humour, pathos, into one splendid poem that is for ever sounding in my ears.

Yes, I feel its influence upon my life, my thoughts, my feelings, that no after study can ever give me. True, I may half forget it, but there will be the lingering music ready to start into life if one should touch the right chord. Then long unthought-of harmonies will sweep across my brain, and I shall drink of a cup refilled with nectar from the vintage of the Wonder Age.

But why am I thinking of all this to-day? What makes me look back, stretching out my hands to the past? Is it that I would dream one more dream of romance ere I settle down quietly to the life that I see before me?

The spring is almost here, and it will steal on quietly and swiftly to throw itself into the arms of summer, and when the summer comes Doris will go. She and Mr. Chester are to be married then, and go to Italy, and my story will be over, and I scarcely think I shall have the heart to begin another.

I am sorry for Mr. Lynn; the link that bound him to his first wife is severed by this late counter-revelation.

It was a terrible shock to him to find that Doris was not his child; I could perceive that, though he strove to conceal how deeply he felt Mr. Carmichael's cruel deception. I had broken it to him as gently as I could.

"Mr. Lynn," I said, "I have come to speak to you upon a sorrowful matter, something connected with the death of Mr. Carmichael."

"If there is anything in which I can be of use to you or to your aunt, pray let me know," he answered, his thoughts taking a direction quite away from himself.

"There is nothing, Mr. Lynn; though there is a request, a favour I shall beg of you when I have told you what I have to say."

I paused, and he waited for me to begin; but it required some courage, and mine was beginning to ooze away. My heart was beating so fast that I could almost hear it, and my lips trembled so that it seemed to me I should not be able to pronounce a single word distinctly enough to be understood.

At length I spoke.

"There was something upon Mr. Carmichael's mind when he died—something that he wished to tell you of, if he had had the power—something for which he would have asked your forgiveness, but it was too late."

"Yes."

“I know now what that something was that weighed so heavily upon him in his dying moments.”

Mr. Lynn was silent, he waited for me to continue.

And then I began to be a coward. How could I tell him what I knew, and dash away the cup of comfort from his lips?

And still he waited. Then I debated in my own mind how to break the disappointing intelligence to him. And the longer I waited, the more cowardly I became. I had no diplomatic skill to break the tidings skilfully; I could not lead him step by step up a ladder of suspense, stabbing his heart at every forward motion, a cruel, lingering way of telling a hard truth that has to be known; for the heart knows that there is more to learn, and waits in mute agony for the final blow. No, anything is better than suspense. Better to learn one's misery at once, better at once to feel the sore sharp wound than to watch in sickening apprehension the sharpening of the knife that is to make it.

I don't think I thought all this at the time, but somehow it came into my heart how I should like to be dealt with myself in such a case, and acting on the impulse of the moment I said,—

“Mr. Carmichael has deceived you; Doris is not the daughter of his sister.”

Mr. Lynn looked at me as though he did not comprehend what I was saying.

“Doris,” I went on, “is the daughter of the French lady who died at sea. Your own child was the one who perished.”

Still Mr. Lynn made no answer, but looked at me.

“Your little child died sleeping on its mother’s breast, her arms were round it; her lips kissed it to its wakeless rest. It never knew care nor sorrow. Oh! do not grieve over it, Mr. Lynn.”

I was half crying myself. Why did Mr. Chester ask me to do this?

At last Mr. Lynn spoke.

“Thank you, Miss Dormer, for taking this errand upon yourself, from no one could the words have come with less pain.”

And then I fairly sobbed, and perhaps that was the best thing I could do, for it roused Mr. Lynn and gave another turn to his thoughts.

“You said you had a request to make; what is it?”

I had forgotten it, but now it darted into my mind.

“Poor Aunt Lotty,” said I, “she does not know how her husband has sinned. She has always been deceived in him.”

Would Mr. Lynn understand me? Yes, he understood me, and he answered,—

“Your aunt shall never know the truth from me.”

I placed Doris’s packet in his hands and then I went away.

As I went I mused how sorrow seems to come to some and not to others. How some lives seem blighted at every turn, whilst others are so brimful of happiness.

They say that if we take one life with another, that we shall find happiness and misery pretty equally divided throughout the world. But this is a proposition the truth of which I have not perhaps fairly investigated, and so I will not decidedly pronounce upon it, still I may remark that at present I do not believe in it. Perhaps I may think differently when I am safely moored in the Age of Faith, for then I may see with other eyes, but at present my eyesight fails me: it may be a mental near-sightedness that will wear off and leave me with clearer vision as time wears on.

Just as I reached the hall-door, Archie and Ernie ran after me. They wanted to know where Doris was, and when she was coming to see them. And as I looked upon their bright, happy faces, I prophesied a fair future for Mr. Lynn, in spite of his present sorrow. Yet what a pity it is that Doris is not their sister, and cannot take care of them. Still that would have been only for a time, for in the summer Doris would leave them. Yes, in the summer Doris and Mr. Chester will have gone, and perhaps I may never see them again. They are neither kith nor kin to any of us at Craythorpe, but have been drifted into the current, and floated along with us for a time; but our way is not their way, and soon they will sail away.

And the last page of my book will record the marriage of my hero and heroine; my romance will be brought to a close; my dream be ended; and I, Joyce Dormer, shall awake to matter-of-fact life once more, such as I used to lead at Credlington.

CHAPTER XXIV. 3

[FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY. THE TIDE TURNS.

"FOR thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

And having written this down, I pause to collect my ideas. I thought it would be so easy to write down everything just as it happened; but now it seems to me that all is confusion, and I know not where or how to begin. My hand trembles so that I can scarcely hold my pen, and the letters run into one another and are misshapen. How foolish I am! Is happiness so much harder to bear than sorrow? Sometimes I think it is; for sorrow is a stern disciplinarian, and teaches one to obey orders. Sorrow keeps one in file, and so one marches on and on with the same monotonous tread, never breaking the ranks.

But happiness is an easy, careless general, who gives no strict commands, and makes life light service to us; yet perhaps not quite so safe, as we are more off our guard when we need to be keeping a watchful look out. Not that I have had much sorrow, but somehow there has been a weight upon me these last few months, I was trying to get rid of it, and I should have done so in time, but now that it

is suddenly lifted off without any effort of my own, I feel as if I had not been brave enough—as if I ought to have dashed the weight to the ground long ago by my own strength. Perhaps, however, I cannot realize how great a weight it was now that my happiness has cast it away. I feel now as if I had been crushed down too much by it, and that it took too firm a hold upon me. And so I have sunk in my own estimation, and see that I, Joyce Dormer, am a poor weak character, not fitted to battle with the world. And yet I did my best,—my best! Ah, that is the mortification, to think that my best was no better.

How surprised Aunt Lotty will be when she knows what has happened; but she cannot be more surprised than I was when Mr. Chester told me.

And now I think the clouds are clearing away from my mental vision, and I can note down with more precision events as they happened.

Doris and Mr. Chester were in Mr. Carmichael's study. Not that I knew they were there, or I should not have gone in. I thought they had walked over to Lynncourt again; for Mr. Lynn seems able to talk to Doris about his first wife more freely than before this last revelation came to our knowledge. They have both received a shock through it, and can, perhaps, the better sympathize on that account.

I wanted a book, so I went in, and there I found Doris and Mr. Chester.

“Oh, Joyce!” said Doris, “you are the very person we

were talking about. Gabriel wants to speak to you about something.”

Mr. Chester looked very much confused, and I could see that he was not altogether pleased with Doris’s speech, neither was I; but no one can guard against Doris’s odd speeches, and I am beginning to get accustomed to them. Therefore I answered,—

“Some other time will do for that, Doris. I want a book now.”

For I could see that Mr. Chester was annoyed. But Doris only laughed, and said that there was no time like the present; “and as it is half about myself, Joyce, I have a right to command Gabriel to tell you when I please.”

And before I could make any reply she had darted out of the room, and left me standing by the bookshelves, and Mr. Chester opposite to me.

I think we both felt very uncomfortable, still I determined not to show it; so I sat down and said very quietly,—

“I am ready to hear anything you wish to say about Doris.”

Mr. Chester did not seem as if he had anything particular to say, or at any rate as if he particularly wished to say it; for he made no answer, and evidently did not know how to begin the subject.

I tried to think what it could possibly be, in order to help him, and then it flashed upon me that it must be something about the wedding; so I said, “I think it is about your marriage, Mr. Chester; perhaps you would wish it to take

place sooner than you think Aunt Lotty would like after her husband's death. But, I am sure, in this case, Aunt Lotty will make no objection to anything you propose. I think I can undertake any negotiation with her that you and Doris may wish. Please let me know if there is anything in which I can be of use."

I think my long speech had a beneficial effect, for Mr. Chester appeared to be more at his ease, and yet there was something so serious in his look that I could not understand it.

"No, Miss Dormer, it was nothing of the kind," he replied; "I am not going to marry Doris; she has broken off the engagement. She does not care for me."

"Not care for you?" I exclaimed, starting up; "not care for you, Mr. Chester? Surely you are mistaken."

"No," he answered, calmly; "there is no mistake; she does not care for me, and our engagement is at an end."

"Oh, Mr. Chester, I am so sorry; I am so grieved for you!"—He looked at me earnestly as I said this—"Oh, cannot I help you?—it is not true?"

"It is quite true; she does not care for me."

He spoke very slowly, and I was surprised even in the midst of my other surprise, to hear him speak so calmly, almost—it seemed to me, so indifferently of the matter.

"Cannot I help you?" I asked again; "can I not persuade Doris——" Here I stopped, for I did not quite know what there was for me to persuade Doris to do.

“No,” he replied; “nothing can be done. Doris and I have agreed that we do not like one another well enough to marry, therefore nothing can be done.”

I was almost too much astonished to speak, but I managed to say, “No,” in a very faint and perplexed voice; then I added, “I suppose Doris did not like to tell me this herself?”

“I do not know; but though I had intended to have left it to her to tell, I am not sorry that she has left it to me.”

I looked up at him in surprise.

“Miss Dormer,” he went on, “I cannot say I made a mistake; for when I asked Doris to marry me, I knew that I liked some one else.”

“That was wrong,” I said, gravely, almost indignantly; for it seemed to me then that I comprehended how it was; and I knew what Doris’s spirit was, and that she would at once give up Mr. Chester when she found out the state of the case.

“How could you do it?” said I; “poor Doris!”

Mr. Chester saw what turn my thoughts had taken.

“No,” he said; “I am not to blame in the way you suppose. Doris never cared about me. She told me as much in the first instance; but we were both in doubt and difficulty and in some trouble, and so we trusted to getting out of it by taking a false step, thinking it to be a very safe and eligible one.”

I was more puzzled than ever.

“Surely, Mr. Chester, that was not the way to overcome any trouble. The best way is to face it and look at it steadily

until one can bear to have it gaze steadily back again (that is, after the first shock is over, for perhaps one can't quite do that at first), for trouble has to be borne in this world."

I had had a little experience of my own, so I felt that I could moralize with good effect. And so I spoke rather energetically, for I could not quite get out of my head that Doris somehow required compassionating. However, Mr. Chester replied,—

"You see Doris and I had not had time to get over the first shock. We were both harassed, and vexed and grieved; but when we came to consider everything, we saw that we had made a mistake, and so Doris—"

"Then it was Doris who found out——"

"Yes, Miss Dormer; it was Doris who found out that there was some one I liked better than herself. Doris found out my hopeless love when she was reading her story in the fire that evening, if you remember."

I did remember; and then, for the first time I also remembered that on that night I had felt the strange feeling of treachery to Doris, and then—no, I could not believe it—it was too incredible; and yet—— For Mr. Chester was standing close beside me, and he asked me, "Miss Dormer, have you no idea who that other person is?"

Then I knew it all in a moment, but I did not answer; and I suppose he knew that I knew it, for he asked again,—

"Joyce, do you not know?"

Then I said, "Yes;" for what else could I say but the

truth? I did not speak very loud; indeed, it was quite a whisper, but Mr. Chester heard it and was satisfied.

And then—but I cannot tell exactly all that was said, so perhaps I had better not write it down as I like to be quite truthful in my narrations. I may, however, say that Mr. Chester made me fully understand all about his engagement to Doris, and that she desires with her whole heart that I should be his wife. And so this present marvel has come to pass; “the morrow” has brought forth that which I expected not; another river than that flowing through Dormer-land has rolled its waters at my feet; roses, such as grew not in Dormer-gardens, have bloomed forth suddenly within my grasp; and as I close my diary for to-night, I note down in wonder at my happiness, that Doris will have her wish gratified.

CHAPTER XV.

JOYCE DORMER'S LAST ENTRY.

WAVE follows wave in the tide of time with ceaseless flow; on, on, to the ocean of eternity. No end to that which hath no beginning; the ages back are as countless as the ages that are to come, and man comprehends it not.

How quickly time flies! I can scarcely realize that nearly six months have slipped away since Mr. Carmichael's death.

Yet so it is. The snowdrops peeped up in January to whisper that Proserpine was already beginning to weary of the darksome regions of Orcus; then the gold and purple crocuses crept forth to tell the same story, and soon the violets breathed forth the rumour they had heard underground of how Proserpine was fastening on her silver sandals, and that Pluto was grieving that he must part with his wife. But Ceres was getting impatient; so were the flowers; they had heard so much of the broad sun and the blue heavens, that they longed to wake up and look at them, but they could not open their eyes until Proserpine had come.

Then suddenly upon a moonlight night she slipped through her prison gates and reached the wide free earth. And the forest boughs bent, and a deep murmur went through the woods to tell of her approach, and the waves lingered on the shore to sing a sweet song, whose burden was "Hail, Proserpine!" And when the morning broke, the breezes wafted the news far and near, and the sun chased all the clouds away and sat on a throne of pure sapphire, so that the flowers awoke to find the skies bluer than they had dreamed of, and they worshipped silver-footed Proserpine as she passed by, and prayed that her reign might be long.

Fairer and fairer grew the flowers to welcome her, and now her reign has reached its summit of glory, and it is summer in the land.

Ah, why need I go back to old myths to describe how spring and summer stole over the earth and loaded it with bud and blossom?

Joyce Dormer, thou wert ever a dreamer; thou wert ever wont to look back with longing eyes into that beautiful past, the more beautiful, inasmuch as time hath spread a veil of magic tissue between it and thee.

As I write I am looking from the little porch window upon the same peaceful landscape that met my tearful eyes scarcely a year ago. But it is even more beautiful now, for the shadow of decay has not yet fallen upon it. Trees, pasture-lands are in their richest garments, and my heart drinks in

the beauty of the scene, and is refreshed and comforted as it was before.

O mother earth, how very fair thou art; how tender, how compassionate to thy children! How dost thou mutely appeal to them, suggesting thoughts of higher, holier, happier things than it is in the lot of most of us to grasp.

Well may the poor city toiler be tempted at sight of thee to fall down and worship, saying, "I have found heaven;" for peace comes with the sight of so much beauty—it is as if a voice were speaking to us, and saying:—

"‘The earth is mine and the fulness thereof;’ have I not made it for thee, O man? have I not given it unto thee? have I not cared for thee?"

Yes, I was comforted as in that time before, when my heart was sad and bitter, and well nigh rebelled against the cup I had to drink, and which I would fain have flung away. But better resolves came, and as I bent my lips and tasted the bitter waters, behold they have turned sweet.

How short a time since I came here; and yet how much has passed! I seem to have lived through another lifetime, and to have gained the wisdom of a lifetime in the last few months. I came here a child as regards the world, fresh from my quiet home and book-worm dreams; but I leave Green Oake a woman. Yes, I leave Green Oake to-morrow, and it will be my home no longer.

To-morrow will be my wedding-day, and Doris is to be my only bridesmaid. And I thought all through my story that

I should have been hers. But she tells me now that that could never have been. Furthermore, she declares that I'm not half so good a story-maker as she is, for my stories are are not so true to life.

Perhaps I differ from her, still I only answer,—

“But how could I look forward to such an ending?”

“That is precisely where it is,” says Doris; “your imagination failed you at the most critical point. You are not fit to weave romances, Joyce.”

And maybe she is right.

Doris is going to remain with Aunt Lotty, and seems quite happy in the thought of it. Aunt Lotty has been drawn towards her more than ever since she read that passage in the poor wife's story.

“Doris,” she said, “she who was a mother to you had faith in me. Stay with me, and be my child, as you were hers.”

And poor little Doris, throwing her arms round Aunt Lotty's neck, replied—

“I am a waif thrown on the kindness of strangers. I have no where else to go.”

But that is not the reason that she stays, and Aunt Lotty knows it.

Doris is now known by her rightful name at Craythorpe. She is no longer Miss Carmichael, but Doris de Ligny, the adopted child of Mr. Carmichael's sister, and daughter of the widowed French lady who perished at sea.

Aunt Lotty holds Mr. Chester in as high estimation as ever, and I know it will be a life-long problem to her, which she will never solve, how it could possibly happen that Doris did not care for him.

Perhaps it may be a difficulty to me, also; but that is a fact I only note down in my diary.

Mr. Chester asked me the other day if he had yet found a place in my story. I did not answer him, but Doris answered for me.

“You have been the hero all throughout, Gabriel, but no one found it out but myself. You see I had more penetration than you, despite your superior wisdom.”

And Mr. Chester laughed, and Aunt Lotty brought out her staple quotation—

“‘The course of true love never did run smooth;’ and I think yours is sure to be a happy marriage, Joyce, because there has been a mistake about it.”

Which paradoxical argument appeared to be perfectly simple and satisfactory to Aunt Lotty; and as we all understood it, no one offered any objection.

Uncle Dormer is here. He and Mr. Lynn are the only guests to-morrow, for Aunt Lotty wishes the wedding to be as quiet as possible. So do I. Six bridesmaids, in tulle veils and wonderful dresses, would make me no happier; nor would they stand in the place of my dear Doris in her simple attire.

Aunt Letheby, as my father's eldest sister, was invited,

but declines coming. She has her own views upon weddings, and does not think it fitting that a Dormer should be ushered into matrimonial life with so little pomp as will attend my wedding. But here is her own letter upon the subject:—

“MY DEAR JOYCE,—I can scarcely convey to you the feeling of extreme pain that it gives me to be compelled, from conscientious motives, to decline being present at your wedding.

“A wedding, like a funeral, is an important ceremony, though, unlike a funeral, it may happen more than once in a life time. (Perhaps I am hardly correct in saying that a funeral happens in a *life-time*. If Dr. Letheby were at home, he could inform me upon the point; but he is not, and the post will be going almost immediately, therefore the remark must pass.) A wedding, however, being an important event, it should, in my estimation, be marked by that outward show which is seemly, and which betokens a regard to the recognised opinions of others.

“Constituted as society is at the present epoch, we owe it to ourselves and to the world in general not to have fewer than six bridesmaids in tulle veils, the bride to have a lace one, (Honiton, Brussels, Nottingham, Irish, &c., as may be most convenient,) a proper number of carriages, and a handsome wedding breakfast, with appropriate speeches.

“These requisites are within the reach of any one marrying from such a house as Green Oake, and I cannot suffi-

ciently blame your Aunt Lotty for dispensing with them. True, she may hold it as an excuse that the late death of Mr. Carmichael would render these judicious pomps and vanities out of place. Therefore the marriage ought to have been deferred. I regard the hurried manner in which the matter is being brought to a conclusion as little better than an elopement. Possibly, my dear, from the amount of trash you have read in bygone days—(though I sincerely trust that such may not be the case)—you may be imbued with the sentiments of *Miss Lydia Languish*, who is so justly held up to reprehension in the play by that excellent person her aunt. (N.B. If ever that play is performed I should like you to see it.) Still, this is an idea I would not willingly entertain of you. And, notwithstanding that upon principle I must decline attending your wedding, I wish you much happiness, and as a tangible expression of my affection I beg your acceptance of a packet that your uncle Dormer will deliver to you from your much attached aunt,

“SOPHIA LETHEBY.”

Ah, well, we all have our peculiarities, and Aunt Letheby is a most excellent woman, in spite of her Dormerism.

But the shadows of evening are falling across the landscape, and I have been sitting here so long that Aunt Lotty will wonder what has become of me.

I must close my diary.

Wait! One more look back into the past ere I shut the clasp upon Joyce Dormer's last entry.

I close my eyes, and, lo! the pageant of the past rises confusedly before me. A little child beside a shining river points to a tiny boat, and beckons me to enter it, and float with her along the flower-crowned waters. And then she fades away, and I see a slender figure fleeing through a snow-storm. And then a funeral sweeps across my vision. And all the while a medley of sights and sounds hovers around me, glimpses of light, and blotches of sorrow spots, and nothing clear. Then I hear the low-pealing thunder and the roar of heavy breakers, and through the blackness and the tumult can descry a stately vessel beating amidst the raging billows. Then comes a wail of despair, a shriek of agony. And then the storm is hushed, and, kneeling on her knees, I see a woman pray, and rise up patient and enduring. Oh! never will her story cease from my heart, but, like a dirge, sound ever mournfully therein, yet sweet and clear, for the strain floats upward to heaven, a long life-prayer that the angel Sandalphon weaves into his fairest garland.

The clouds dispel, the darkness flees away, and athwart the clear grey sky a rainbow of loveliest hues is thrown, and in its glowing colours I read one word—"Hope!"

And bluer grow the heavens, and in their midst a star is shining—a star so bright that the sun's light dims it not.

Shine on, O Star of Faith! shine on for ever through my life—through grief, through joy; in time of adversity, in time of wealth; through dark night-watches, and through fair bright days, until thou lightest me into the sure haven wherein I may find “the Everlasting Yea, wherein all contradiction is solved, and wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him.”

I close my diary. Another epoch in my life is over, and with the morrow another epoch will begin.

The tale that I began half in my dreams to weave is told —“Joyce Dormer’s Story” is ended.

THE END.

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Goddard, Julia Bachope,

Joyce Dormer's Story

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